



SSA EVALUATION 2007-2008

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**A report prepared by GHK with Breen and Partners for the
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526 Fulham Road, London SW6 5NR
Tel: 020 7471 8000; Fax: 020 7736 0784
www.ghkint.com

Sector Skills Development Agency: Research Series

Foreword

In October 2002 the then Department for Education and Skills (now DIUS) formally launched Skills for Business (SfB), a new UK-wide network of employer-led Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), supported and directed by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). The purpose of SfB is to bring employers more centre stage in articulating their skill needs and delivering skills-based productivity improvements that can enhance UK competitiveness and the effectiveness of public services. The remit of the SSDA includes establishing and progressing the network of SSCs, supporting the SSCs in the development of their own capacity and providing a range of core services. Additionally the SSDA has responsibility for representing sectors not covered by an SSC and co-ordinating action on generic issues.

Research, and developing a sound evidence base, is central to the SSDA and to Skills for Business as a whole. It is crucial in: analysing productivity and skill needs; identifying priorities for action; and improving the evolving policy and skills agenda. It is vital that the SSDA research team works closely with partners already involved in skills and related research to generally drive up the quality of sectoral labour market analysis in the UK and to develop a more shared understanding of UK-wide sector priorities.

The SSDA is undertaking a variety of activities to develop the analytical capacity of the Network and enhance its evidence base. This involves: developing a substantial programme of new research and evaluation, including international research; synthesizing existing research; developing a common skills and labour market intelligence framework; taking part in partnership research projects across the UK; and setting up an expert panel drawing on the knowledge of leading academics, consultants and researchers in the field of labour market studies. Members of this panel will feed into specific research projects and peer review the outputs; be invited to participate in seminars and consultation events on specific research and policy issues; and will be asked to contribute to an annual research conference.

The SSDA takes the dissemination of research findings seriously. As such it has developed this dedicated research series to publish all research sponsored by the SSDA.

Lesley Giles

Director of Strategy and Research at the SSDA

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *2007-2008 Evaluation of Sector Skills Agreements* (SSAs) is the last in a series of evaluations of the SSA policy conducted by the SSDA¹. It focused primarily on the implementation and impact of the SSA across the UK to date, in terms of the following dimensions:

- Using LMI to support planning and investment in vocational education and training (VET)
- Developing relationships with key stakeholders to gain influence
- Employer engagement, involvement and commitment
- The SSA link to wider Sector Skills Council (SSC) & Skills for Business network (SfBn) activities
- The SSA impact on SSC capacity and capability
- Quality of the SSA development process and output.

1.1 Using LMI to support planning and investment in VET

Research and intelligence is the cornerstone of the SSA. The way it has been used as part of the SSA process (systematically, comprehensively, iteratively) to set employer priorities is a step forward in debates regarding sector skills. The real innovation employed by some SSCs has been the use of LMI as a means of challenging employer perspectives. This has the potential for significant future impact.

Over time it has become more generally accepted that SSCs should be facilitating a dialogue that goes beyond what employers 'want' to offer to something more reflexive. Not all employers will agree with all of the analysis produced by SSCs, but the SSA has been successful in bringing together a complex mix of 'hard' evidence in the form of LMI and industry understanding – so that the most effective SSCs are taking a macro perspective on their sectors rather than simply lobbying for the loudest shouting employers. Afterwards, SSCs should be able to understand, explain and interpret the perspectives of a heterogeneous employer voice. This is of immense value in a demand-led system.

Detailed discussions with partners about the quality of the LMI remains a sticking point for some SSCs, but there is general consensus about the 'story' presented in each of the SSAs. Apart from a small number of individual examples, we found little dispute about the general thrust of the picture presented in the agreements. This has been absolutely critical in beginning to build a consensus about the required actions in each sector. However, the identification of a skills gap or shortage is not in itself sufficient for action. One of the key factors influencing the extent to which LMI can influence planning is the way in which it is packaged and used by SSCs in relation to specific audiences. The SSA provides a large volume of intelligence that has to then be tailored for maximum impact.

¹ Previous evaluations are: Evaluation of the Pathfinder Sector Skills Agreement process, SSDA Research Report 15 and Sector Skills Agreements Implementation Progress Report, SSDA Research Report 24. Both are available from: <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=41>

1.2 Developing relationships with key stakeholders to gain influence

SSAs have also become embedded within strategic and delivery planning across a number of geographic areas. In fact, the main overall success from the SSA process to date relates to having a better-connected conduit to feed the sectoral, employer perspective into skills policy and planning. As a result, there is more rigour, vision and planning around employer skills issues and strategy formulation than there was in the past.

The key outcome is that demand-led considerations are more prominent in all of these debates. Where common interests are aligned, this is beginning to influence provision. Some relatively substantial shifts are beginning to emerge (e.g. in relation to LSC funding in England), but it remains early days for these types of impact. Larger, more sophisticated SSCs might have been able to deliver this without a defined SSA process – but it would probably have taken longer to get there. For the smaller and newer SSCs, it has been important that there was a defined process, which partners understood.

SSCs have, though, been limited in being able to pin down concrete actions by an extensive reliance on partners. This partly reflects the realities of policy-making and that the SSA input could only ever be one voice or a single source of intelligence into the policy mix (albeit a voice that requires attention if the sectoral approach to the demand for skills is to be successful). One respondent described the SSA as '*a starter for ten*', but a number of stakeholders emphasised the importance of having something, an analysis and agreement, that is written down. The overall SSA prescription may not be news to informed stakeholders but having a systematic process to present it in this way helps to redefine the terms of the debate.

Without any real levers for change, though, the SfBn (both SSCs and SSDA) have tended for the most part to be reactive and accommodating of stakeholders requirements. There have been systemic blockages that have restricted the potential for SfBn influence:

- For the most part, there are no collective mechanisms to influence employer investment available to SSCs.
- Funding for public provision in skills development is linked to separate and devolved planning processes that SSCs can only influence indirectly.
- Decision-making is increasingly focused on the nations and regions, where there are parallel sets of organisations undertaking equivalent dialogue and SSC involvement is variable.

1.3 Employer engagement, involvement and commitment

The SSA has put in place the rationale and framework for employers to increase investment. This is a long-term process, but the SSC influence is starting to be felt. There are two aspects to the SSA impact on relationships with employers:

- Mobilising employers to influence the shape of skills provision: There are numerous examples of individual commitments from employers to shape skills provision. Yet this individual support is difficult to capture in the context of the SSA. It may be relatively fluid and is about employers offering time and expertise. For example, some SSCs are adept at mobilising key employers tactically to support the case for action.

- Broadening the base for employer engagement in skills investment and planning and, as a consequence, influencing employer behaviour in relation to skills: In developing and delivering SSAs, SSCs have to work with engaged employers to show creditability and buy-in. This is a logical response, but does not meet the wider ambition, reiterated by Leitch, of widening employer investment in skills. There is a more fundamental question here about what the realistic expectations for employer commitment could be in the context of the SSA. An agreement cannot be expected to contain commitments relating to the specific use of provision by employers. The impact has to be in terms of building significant endorsement from employers, which is a necessary precursor to changing employer behaviour.

1.4 The SSA link to key SSC & SfBn activities

The SSA is fairly all-encompassing in scope. Through the SSA, skill needs and priorities are being addressed on a number of levels. The added value from the agreement can therefore be judged by the extent to which it contains a coherent framework for action (this seems to be an area of great variability between SSCs). Activities included in the published agreements can be clustered into the following categories:

- Networking and influencing activities (Using the 'employer voice' to shape skills policy; Influencing funding and skills planning; Promoting employer investment in skills development; Networking)
- Interventions addressing priority skill needs (Management and leadership skills; Generic, employability and basic skills; IT / technology skills; Customer service skills; Language; Targeted programmes to tackle specific skills gaps and shortages)
- Business support activities (Business improvement; Skills brokerage & Training Needs Assessment; HR Processes & organisation)
- Activities to support recruitment and retention and improve labour supply (Career pathways; Information, Advice and Guidance activities; Improving sector reputation and promotion; Diversifying the workforce profile; Migrant workers)
- Developing provision and qualifications (Accreditation; new forms of delivery; actions to 'qualify' or professionalise the workforce; Continuing Professional Development; Improving supply side capacity & quality; Developing new courses & qualifications; Qualification reform & supply side infrastructure; National occupational standards & competency development and Apprenticeships)
- Products (Passports & registration schemes; Labour market intelligence).

A number of approaches to managing implementation have become apparent. The SSA may be subsumed within wider SSC activities. It may become a project tool or simply a staging post for partnership working. In rare cases, it becomes the basis for a joint programme of work. The management of implementation is vexed because it was not anticipated that SSCs would be delivery agents for most actions. Yet they have de facto become so in many contexts. This leaves SSCs with two avenues for implementation. First, they can take forward actions within their control and capacity and embed these within their own business planning processes. Second, SSCs can use the SSA discussions and evidence as a starting point for accessing funding, although this is often small-scale and piecemeal.

Overall SSA progress is therefore dependent on a range of external contingencies. For example, SSA actions relating to provision and qualifications have been hampered by the slow progress on funding and qualification reform. In the absence of a reformed qualification system that can link skills and training provision to the occupational skills and standards needed by employers and employees, SSCs have had to focus on other ways of influencing supply. Yet over a longer timescale, the SSA has been integral to providing employer input into the reform of UK vocational qualifications, by way of the development of Sector Qualifications Strategies (SQS). There is no way that the vast majority off SSCs would be in the position to develop an SQS without first undertaking the SSA process which provides the evidence base.

1.5 The SSA impact on SSC capacity and capability

The SSA process has impacted on the capacity and capability of SSCs. It has led to a more consistent research 'offer' across the SSCs (i.e. the availability of up-to-date information and intelligence on skill needs, gaps and shortages, as well as provision, much of which drills down to sub-sector levels). It has also led to very significant improvements in sector-based LMI. SSAs are seen by stakeholders as helping SSCs to mature, creating the perception in some areas that by the end of the process, SSCs have an understanding of their sector and have employers behind them.

There is also now an infrastructure in place for the SSCs across the UK nations and regions. Whether this infrastructure is sufficient for implementing (or in some cases developing) an SSA agenda is a separate point. A common message from all of the geographic case studies is that as skills delivery has become increasingly devolved to nations and regions, SSC resourcing has not reflected the basic requirements for UK-wide coverage, putting SSA implementation at risk for the majority of SSCs.

1.6 Quality of the SSA development process and output

The mechanics of the (five stage) SSA development process have become clearer over time, but the concept has fragmented as the process has been increasingly devolved to the level of nations and regions. It has meant that, in some cases, SSCs are being judged against shifting expectations among different groups of partners, which are much more difficult to meet.

A number of models have emerged for managing the SSA development process in the nations and regions. It is clear that the closer the management of the SSA process comes to the interests of the people 'sitting round the table', the more likely it is that substantial 'deals' could be achieved. The Sector Skills Productivity Alliances (SSPA) in the North West of England are testament to the potential of this approach. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the project board model has tightened up the whole SSA development process. It has, though, created a tier of 'process'-focused stakeholders who sit on the project boards and commit extensive time for quality assurance and meeting with SSCs. It is still unclear how many of these stakeholders, who have invested so much time and resource through the project boards, can (or will) support SSA implementation.

1.7 Going Forward

Going forward from here we would suggest that the SSA continues, with a lighter touch process but with stronger commitments to outcomes. There needs to be an on-going agreement about what the different partners will deliver for employers. Thus far, in reality, the SSA is an agreement between the SSC and the public sector on behalf of employers and endorsed by employers. In the future, the SSAs, in order to ensure delivery, need to present a much stronger case for market failure and justification for public sector investment and be clear what employers, especially large ones, are prepared to fund themselves. The SSA should be seen as work in progress but even so it has managed to deliver some important benefits in many cases.

If one thinks that the purpose of SSAs was to deliver quick and substantial changes to the skills infrastructure then it was probably not the right way to go about it. However, if one thinks of the SSAs as fundamentally about relationships and changing the way in which the demand and supply-side interacts on investing in skills and commissioning training then one could argue that SSAs have set in train the potential for fundamental and sustainable change. But those changes are not manifest yet. Retaining a strengthened but pared down version of the SSA would ensure that the dialogue and relationships between the demand and supply side continue to evolve.

2 INTRODUCTION

The SSA process, which is being undertaken by each of the 25 Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), aims for a step change in employer influence over skills development and planning across the UK. Agreements are developed by way of a five-stage process based around research, consultation and 'deal making' between employers and the 'supply side':

- Stage 1: A robust, future-facing skills needs assessment (the demand side assessment).
- Stage 2: An assessment of current provision (the supply side assessment).
- Stage 3: An analysis of the gaps between supply and demand – as the basis for defining future priorities for action.
- Stage 4: Agreeing the scope for collaborative action with employers.
- Stage 5: Developing an action plan with partners to tackle the identified issues and outlining the contribution of each partner towards these ends – as the basis for holding partners accountable for achieving real change.

2.1 Evaluation Objectives

The main objective of the SSA Evaluation is to evaluate progress and begin to assess the extent to which the Skills for Business network (SfBn) has been successful in meeting the SSA policy objectives.

2.1.1 *SSA policy objectives*

The policy objectives for the SSA are as follows:

- To identify the drivers of productivity and competitiveness in the sector, and what constitutes leading-edge practice around the world, as a basis for setting ambitions and goals for raising productivity in the sector.
- To support measurable improvements in business performance against international competitors (or other performance benchmarks where there is no international competition).
- To identify the skills that will be needed in order to achieve those ambitions and targets, at different levels and in different generic and specialist areas.
- To agree how those skills are best secured, through training of new entrants and those already in the sector labour force.
- To set a framework of occupational standards which can drive the design of training programmes; and give employers an effective role in steering the content and delivery of learning provision to meet key industry requirements.
- To agree with the LSC and training providers, and other relevant funding partners how publicly available funding can best be deployed to support achievement of those goals, including flexible delivery of training in ways that suit employers and learners; and thereby secure the best match between these identified skill needs, and the response of the training supply side in meeting the needs (England only).

- To agree with ELWa and training providers, HEFCW and the HE sector and other relevant funding partners how publicly available funding can best be deployed to support achievement of those goals, including flexible delivery of training in ways that suit employers and learners; and thereby secure the best match between these identified skill needs, and the response of the training supply side in meeting the needs (Wales only).
- To facilitate SSCs in their work with the Enterprise Networks, the Funding Councils, the SQA, Learndirect Scotland, Careers Scotland and other relevant partners, to ensure that the outputs of agreements support the achievement of the goals of these bodies. (This will include appropriate delivery of training in ways that suit employers and learners; best use of public funding; well defined skills needs which are understood by the training supply side and which influence the delivery of provision) (Scotland only).
- To identify any elements of current training and skills policy and operations that place significant restrictions on the ability of employers to meet the skill needs of their sectors, and to provide a mechanism for resolving these issues (Scotland only).
- To review the range of potential mechanisms for voluntary collective action by employers in pursuing skills and productivity needs; and identify which mechanism(s) will best suit the circumstances of that sector (Scotland only).
- To broker agreement with sector employers on the best means of implementing those mechanisms; and articulate the employer contribution to developing and delivering world class learning opportunities (Scotland only).
- To co-ordinate and combine existing training and skills policies to make them work to best effect to meet the needs of the sector; and to align and co-ordinate existing sector-based productivity initiatives so that they deliver greatest impact (Scotland only).

2.1.2 Key evaluation questions

A series of evaluation questions were set out in the project specification:

- **Success and outcomes.** What progress has been made with developing and implementing SSA action plans and how successful has this been? What constitutes success? What are the contextual factors that effect success and what effect do they have on SSA development and implementation? What examples of good practice exist? How has the relationship between skills demand and supply changed as a result of SSA activity? Are SSAs influencing private and public education and skills provision? What is the added value of an SSA?
- **Progress, development and implementation.** Is continuous progress and improvement being made or has initial progress plateaued? How well can the public sector funding, planning, and delivery partners as currently constituted, support SSAs? What factors have facilitated and hindered progress of SSA development and implementation? How have any barriers to implementation and effectiveness been overcome? What barriers to SSC progress (e.g. in the skills systems) persist and what action is required to address these? Are there different models of SSAs e.g. differences adopted in the four nations and/or regions? What are the benefits and problems associated with the various models used to implement SSA action plans?

- **Relationships.** How have the SSAs affected existing relationships between the network and its key stakeholders and partners? How is the Skills for Business network influencing partners and how can influence be improved? Have new partnerships or relationships been created? If so, how successful have these been? What factors contribute to successful partnership and how?
- **Employers.** Have the SSAs had an influence on the perceptions and behaviour of employers? How are employers involved? What actions/strategies can secure greater employer collaboration and investment in Skills for Business network activities and skills development?

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Initial scoping: the 'State of Play' report

The first stage of this evaluation was the production of a 'State of Play' report². It was developed as an internal position paper for the SfBn, drawing together the wealth of information already available in relation to the SSA process. We also interviewed a number of SSDA staff, including the: Chief Executive, Director of Performance, Director of Strategy and Research, Director of Partnerships and Agreements; and the Head of SSA Development.

This was partly to frame the evaluation itself – i.e. to understand the key questions for assessing SSA impact and the future of the SSA on the basis of what had been learned already. It was also to prompt discussion within the network about what the SSA process represents for SSCs in practice, especially given the scale of the task, its evolution and the way in which it permeates everything that an SSC does.

2.2.2 The main fieldwork stage

The main fieldwork stage has been based around 12 qualitative case studies, which ran from August to November 2007. There were two types of case study: geographic case studies (each of which focused on a nation or English region) and sector case studies (each of which focused on one of the 25 SSCs). The case study sample was based around six sector and six geographic case studies encompassing a range of different types:

- **Sector:** Coverage by: SSC maturity (using SSA tranche as a proxy); main sector typology – at least one of each of the service, manufacturing and public sectors; sector size (using number of employees as a proxy) – at least one small, medium and large sector.
- **Geographic:** Coverage of: all of the nations; at least one English region that could be described as relatively well-engaged with the SfBn; and one English region that could be described as less well-engaged.

The 12 case studies focused on:

- **Sector:** Skills for Logistics; SkillsActive; Lantra; Skills for Justice; Cogent; People 1st.

² SSAs: The State of Play, SSDA, 2008, Research Report 28 is available from:
<http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=41>

- **Geographic:** Scotland; Wales; Northern Ireland; North West; East of England; London.

Each case study included interviews across the three groups: SSC staff; stakeholders and employers. The two types of case study were distinct in that the geographic case studies were more outward focused – primarily targeting SfBn partners and stakeholders. The sector case studies focused more closely on SSC staff. A total of 122 in-depth interviews were undertaken across the 12 case studies. The topic guide used for the case study interviews is included in Annex 2.

2.2.3 Evaluation framework

The evaluation framework provided the basis for understanding SSA impact. The SSC standard underpinned the framework, alongside work that has been done by the network to bottom out employer engagement. The framework was also informed by our understanding what SSA success looks like and how the SSAs are being implemented in practice (as summarised in the earlier State of Play report).

A detailed outline of the evaluation framework is included in Annex 3, showing how its components relate to evaluation tasks and the specific case studies. A simple overview of the components is provided in Table 2.1 below. Note that the complexity of likely impacts meant that the evaluation framework was used as a guide for informing the fieldwork and reporting rather than a tool for more formal assessment.

2.2.4 This report

The remainder of this report is based around the following sections:

- Section 3 – Overview of Sector Skills Agreements in 2007: This section provides an overview of progress with the SSA process, in terms of the production of Agreements and the impact the whole process has had on the capacity and capability of the SSCs. It also provides an overview of the main areas of action contained within the SSAs produced to date and the extent to which this constitutes a step forward in skills development for the UK.
- Section 4 – SSA Development & Implementation: This section looks at progress with the five-stage SSA development process and approaches to then implementing Agreements once they are in place.
- Section 5 – Impact: This section provides an outline of how SSA impact can be understood. It then considers impact in terms of relationships with partners and employers, as well as the use of LMI to support skills planning and investment. It discusses success to date both in terms of direct SSA-related outcomes and outcomes that are linked to wider SSC activities.
- Section 6 – Prospects for the Future: The final section considers the prospects for the SSA process going forward and contains recommendations for all of the key actors involved in development and implementation.

The annexes contain a list of the case study interviewees (Annex 1), the main case study topic guide (Annex 2) and the evaluation framework (Annex 3).

Table 2.1 Overview of the Evaluation Framework Components

Evaluation Components	Detail	How the Components are Considered in this Report
1. Using LMI to support local / regional / national planning and investment	a) Quality of SSA LMI	These components focus specifically on SSA implementation, delivery and impact.
	b) Use of SSA LMI	
	c) Impact of and influence from SSA LMI	
2. Developing relationships with key stakeholders to gain influence	a) Positioning	They are shaped around the key aspects of the SSA process: ➤ intelligence; ➤ stakeholder engagement ➤ and employer engagement.
	b) Impact / Influence	
3. Employer engagement, involvement and commitment	a) Evidence of employer awareness and understanding growing as a result of the SSA (<i>NB: considered separately in the context of SfBn employer survey</i>)	They are considered throughout the report but provide the focus for Section 5.
	b) Employer dealings and involvement in delivering the SSA	
	c) Employer commitment and mobilisation	
4. The SSA link to key SSC & SfBn activities	a) Links to other SSC activities	This component also focuses on implementation, delivery and impact, but reflects the wider (or more indirect) impact of the SSA on other SSC/SfBn-related activities, such as the development of standards and qualifications These impacts are also considered in Section 5.
	b) Network influence activities	
5. The SSA impact on SSC capacity and capability	a) SSC capacity building / capability	This component has an internal focus (i.e. on the SSC as an organisation), looking at the way in which undertaking the SSA process has impacted on the capacity and capability of individual SSCs. It is considered in Section 3.
6. Quality of the SSA	a) Quality of the SSA development process	This component focuses on the SSA development process itself and the output or 'product'. The quality of the SSA process is features in Section 4 of the report.
	b) Quality of the SSA output	

3 OVERVIEW OF SECTOR SKILLS AGREEMENTS IN 2007

This section provides an overview of the current state of play in terms of the development and publication of Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs) across the 25 SSCs, as well as the related impact that SSA development has had on the capability of the Skills for Business network (SfBn) – i.e. the extent to which the SSA has been a tool for building network capacity.

We also provide an overview of the types of actions contained within the various SSAs, summarising the ‘change agenda’ contained within the Agreements and looking at the extent to which SSAs have moved forward strategic debates in terms of skills development and planning.

3.1 The Current State of Play

It is four and a half years since the announcement of the SSA programme in a White Paper by the then Department for Education and Skills³. The first SSCs (four pathfinders) embarked on the SSA development process in early 2004. The second and third Tranches of SSCs kicked off over the course of 2005 and most of the final Tranche of SSCs started SSA development work in early to mid 2006. Table 3.1 below shows how the 25 SSCs mapped against the four SSA-development Tranches.

Table 3.1 SSA Development Tranches

Development Phase	Sector Skills Council
Pathfinder (launched SSA mid-2005)	ConstructionSkills; e-skills UK; SEMTA; Skillset (4)
Tranche 2 (launched SSA in late 2006 / early 2007)	Cogent; Lantra; Skillfast-UK; SkillsActive; Skills for Health; Skills for Logistics (6)
Tranche 3 (launched SSA in mid- to late- 2007)	Automotive Skills; Asset Skills; Improve; GoSkills; People 1 st ; Skills for Justice (6)
Tranche 4 (anticipated completion by March 2008)	Creative & Cultural Skills; Energy & Utility Skills; Financial Services Skills Council; Government Skills; Lifelong Learning UK; Proskills; Skills for Care and Development; Skillsmart Retail; Summitskills (9)

Source: SSA Development Timeline (October, 2007)⁴

It has taken around 18 months for most SSCs to develop their SSAs and up to two years for some of the later SSCs. Over time, though, it has become less clear where the process starts and where it ends (see Section 4.2.1). The expectation has been that the SSA development process would be complete by March 2008 (not the case for Northern Ireland, where the process started later). This is broadly still achievable in the sense that SSA ‘completion’ has become an increasingly fluid notion.

³ 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential, July 2003.

⁴ Available from: <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=2136>

However, by November 2007, 15 SSCs had produced at least partial Sector Skills Agreements that were publicly available and accessible⁵. There are also now SSAs in place for each of the UK nations. The SSA 'finishing line' is staggered across different geographic areas, reflecting the extent to which separate processes have been embedded over time. Table 3.2 below provides an overview of the publications of agreements by geographic area for each SSC.

Table 3.2 Coverage of Published SSAs

SSC	UK	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	England	English Regions
Automotive Skills			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Cogent			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
ConstructionSkills		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Energy & Utility Skills		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
e-skills UK		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
GoSkills	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Improve			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lantra ⁶		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People 1st ⁷					<input type="checkbox"/>	
Semta (EEA ⁸)	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Semta (Marine)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Skillfast-UK	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Skills for Health			<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Skills for Logistics			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
SkillsActive		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Skillset		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Source: SSDA and SSC websites

SSCs now tend to complete the development process in Scotland and Wales before England (which is a reversal of earlier in the process) as a result of streamlined protocols being established by the Project Boards in those nations. Some published agreements remain in draft form (even some pathfinder SSCs appear to have only draft agreements for specific geographic areas). It is not the complete picture because we know that SSA outputs have been packaged and presented in various ways by different SSCs. People 1st, for example, has produced (for England) a skills strategy that it feels subsumes the SSA. Mostly SSCs are tailoring the output and how it is presented to suit industry audiences, which is a sensible approach. There is a risk, though, for a small number of SSCs that seem to be downplaying the SSA output in any form, as it potentially undermines its role as a commitment or statement of intent (however that is defined in practice).

⁵ i.e. through either the SSDA website or the SSC's own website.

⁶ Has specific action plans by industry group (15 in England, 7 in Scotland, 7 in Wales, 14 in Northern Ireland).

⁷ Published in the form of a skills strategy based around 10 priority actions.

⁸ Electronics, Automotive and Aerospace Industries

3.2 Capacity and Capability

The SSA process has impacted on the capacity and capability of SSCs:

- This is seen clearest in terms of it ensuring that each SSC completing an SSA has an established research function and an LMI evidence base for the sector.
- There is also now an infrastructure in place within the SSCs to enable them to engage across the UK nations and regions.
- It has Influenced SSC business planning.

3.2.1 *Research capacity and the LMI evidence base*

The SSA process implies that each SSC has an established research function, a fully-functioning employer network that spans the sector footprint, and UK-wide reach in terms of presence and stakeholder engagement. Yet some SSCs have only recently established their service offer, networks and staffing capabilities. It became apparent fairly early on in the development of SSAs that the process requires a diverse skill set within the SSC – in terms of research skills and skills to translate the research findings into meaningful policy and strategic priorities.

In this context, the SSA process has led to a more consistent research ‘offer’ across the SSCs (i.e. the availability of up-to-date, information and intelligence on skill needs, gaps and shortages, as well as provision, much of which drills down to sub-sector and regional levels). It has also led to very significant improvements in sector-based LMI. In fact, from an analytical standpoint, the attempts to assess current provision (Stage 2 of the process), while being one of the most difficult parts of the SSA process to complete effectively – has led to advances in our understanding of what information is and is not available.

3.2.2 *Developing a UK-wide infrastructure*

SSAs are seen by stakeholders as helping SSCs to mature. This is particularly true in a relatively engaged region such as the North West of England. There was a perception voiced by stakeholders in the North West that by the end of the process, SSCs have an understanding of their sector and have employers behind them. By comparison, those SSCs that have not produced an SSA are seen as having little to offer. The SSA process itself forces an SSC to engage with such a substantial number of employers and stakeholders that a geographic infrastructure has to emerge as a by-product (i.e. staff responsible for employer and stakeholder engagement within all of the nations and many regions; employer and stakeholder networks being established by geographic area). SSCs themselves report that the SSA process was a key driver for embedding such widespread engagement.

Whether this infrastructure is sufficient for implementing (or in some cases developing) an SSA agenda is a separate point. A common message from all of the geographic case studies is that as skills delivery has become increasingly devolved to nations and regions, SSC resourcing has not reflected the basic requirements for UK-wide coverage. This issue is shown in its starkest light in the context of the SSA, especially in terms of implementation. For example, the Review of the SfBn in Scotland in 2006 found that 15 out of the 25 SSCs

had 1 or 2 staff members in Scotland, who were effectively asked to perform multiple roles (employer engagement, developing stakeholder relationships, SSA development etc)⁹.

This is mirrored across the nations and regions for at least two-thirds of the SSCs. The typical SSC model (to the extent that such a model exists) supposes that thinly-spread geographic staff are supported by a 'hub' at the SSC head office. Yet it is increasingly clear that being based within the geographic area is critical for 'doing business' in the context of the SSA, which inevitably puts pressure on those staff within the nations and regions. So, while the SSA has supported the UK-wide development of SSCs, it has arguably raised further questions about how to manage geographic engagement. There is a strong link between those SSCs reported by partners as being best able to engage (e.g. ConstructionSkills; Lantra) and the size of the SSC.

It is also difficult to separate out SSA capacity and capability improvements from the general 'staffing up' that resulted from some SSCs being new organisations when they started the process. In fact, increases in SSC capacity have been far more clearly derived from other activities, such as the development of national skills academies in England or having responsibility for additional strands of work (e.g. LLUK's role in delivering FE White Paper commitments for DIUS in England). The SSA has, though, put a number of SSCs in the position to be able to respond to some of these more concrete programmes of work.

3.2.3 Influencing SSC business planning

There was a lot of reference among SSC interviewees to the SSA becoming an effective business planning process for the SSC, but the evidence of how substantial this is in practice is mixed. It has provided a clear, evidenced set of priorities for directing the future efforts of the SSC. However, it has become increasingly apparent in later SSA Tranches that the agreement is developed and managed as a fixed project, partly because that is how the funding was conceived. This runs counter to some of the earlier experiences of SSCs using the SSA development process to join up various functions (research, nations and regions engagement, standards and qualifications, senior staff inputs), which may have previously operated in silos. As one SSDA stakeholder reported, *'they've [some SSCs] just given it to one person [to develop the SSA], which has meant that the organisation as a whole hasn't learned'*. It is also hard to distinguish the SSA as something tangible and separate from what SSCs are doing generally (i.e. the link between an SSA and SSC business planning may be opaque).

A significant number of interviewees went further, suggesting that the SSA itself had a negative impact on the development of the SSC (as if the two processes were mutually exclusive). One of the case study SSC chief executives felt that the SSA had hindered development because it had diverted attention from other areas of work (*'the requirements kept changing, the milestones changed...[the] research team couldn't do anything but the SSA....it was exceptionally constraining'*). A stakeholder in the nations concurred, feeling that the ends did not justify the means: *'SSC staff going through the process are spending so much time on preparing documents, especially for devolved nations, when there is so much other important work they could be doing'*. This notion of the SSA as a distraction is

⁹ Review of the Skills for Business network in Scotland, SSDA, June 2006, p56. Available from: <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=5>

contested, and there seems to be more credence in saying that an over-emphasis on process for some meant that potential benefits were hard to realise.

3.3 The 'Change Agenda' as set out in the SSAs

3.3.1 *Analysis of the main types of action proposed in the SSA*

The activities included in the SSAs can be clustered into the following categories:

- Networking and influencing activities
- Interventions addressing priority skill needs
- Business support activities
- Activities to support recruitment and retention (improving labour supply)
- Developing provision and qualifications
- Products.

Table 3.3 at the end of the section provides an overview of the main priority activities contained within the SSAs published to date. This is derived from the Table in Annex 4 that maps SSA priority actions by SSC.

Networking and influencing activities aimed at partners (developing specific programmes or shifting funding policies) and employers (encouraging employers to adopt particular standards, approaches and improving the capacity for skills investment) are arguably the most strategic and long-term actions included within the agreements and, as such, tend to be more broadly defined as activities. In a sense, these activities mark a continuation of the SSA development process and underpin the more concrete types of action (e.g. the development of new provision, products such as skills passports and online tools etc) below.

There is a lot of commonality in the **actions addressing priority skill needs**. This reflects the fact that similar skills issues and priorities are raised by employers across different sectors (e.g. the identification of management and leadership as a cross-cutting dimension to identified skill needs), the focus on common drivers (technology, globalisation etc) and the way in which employer priorities are defined in generic terms (employability skills; graduate employability; the aforementioned cross-cutting skills etc).

There are a series of employer-facing actions that involve the delivery of **business support services**. These are sometimes articulated in the context of working with employers to improve HR and business processes, and includes brokerage and individual company support programmes. The SSC role in these actions varies and may involve the SSC leading delivery or influencing the activities of intermediaries (such as Train to Gain brokers or HRD advisors in Wales) by providing sector-specific expertise.

A major area of SSC action relates to **support for recruitment and retention**. There are several dimensions to this, which are often considered by SSCs in tandem. A large number of SSAs identify sector reputation as an issue and the promotion of the sector as a key solution. Activities relating to the provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) are common across the SSAs and provide a relatively tangible focus for SSC action, ranging from working with schools and careers agencies to developing websites and campaigns for

sector promotion. In some sectors, IAG activities include a specific diversity dimension to address identified inequalities. The development of career pathways and progression routes is an important priority area for some sectors (Skills for Health, Improve, Cogent, and Skills for Logistics, for example) and involves a series of actions to develop and embed agreed competencies and role profiles as a means of reducing skills gaps and facilitating the supply of labour at different levels.

Actions to **develop provision and qualifications** include tackling specific, identified gaps in provision, as well as actions targeting providers and promoting new forms of delivery (e.g. bite-sized, flexible learning). It also includes specific activities to qualify the workforce through the accreditation of prior learning etc. There are a range of important activities on the development of standards and qualifications that are not necessarily presented within the SSA because they relate to the wider qualification reform programme and are packaged as actions within the separate Sector Qualifications Strategies (SQSs). It means that SSA solutions only tell half the story.

The final area of activity relates to the **development of products**, such as skills passports, skills development toolkits, on line services and codes of practice (note, there is some overlap here with wider IAG activities). The development of further LMI as 'a product' is also often considered in this context.

Looking across the SSCs, the SSA focus reflects the skills profile of the relevant industries. There are a cluster of SSCs (including GoSkills, People 1st, Improve, Lantra) that have prioritised actions aimed at entry level and for whom there are opportunities to promote solutions that build on the welfare to work agenda and government employability targets (such as the Level 2 entitlement in England). There are also a cluster of SSCs where the priority is higher-level skills (Skillset, Financial Services Skills Council, e-skills UK, many of the public sector SSCs) and for whom actions such as influencing the HE sector have greater prominence. Cutting across these two clusters are a set of SSCs with a greater tradition of formal vocational learning (e.g. apprenticeships), such as Semta, Cogent etc.

3.3.2 Assessment of stretch and added value

The SSA has progressed the debate on skills and productivity, although its main added value has been to provide a basis for discussion (setting out what the issues are more than agreeing solutions to those issues). One respondent described the SSA as '*a starter for ten*', but a number of stakeholders emphasised the importance of having something, an analysis and agreement, that is written down. The overall SSA prescription may not be news to informed stakeholders but having a systematic process to present it in this way helps to redefine the terms of the debate.

What is interesting is that beyond detailed discussions about the quality of the LMI there is general consensus about the 'story' presented in each of the SSAs. Apart from a small number of individual examples, we found little dispute about the general thrust of the picture presented in the agreements. This has been absolutely critical in beginning to build a consensus about the required actions in each sector. The value of this, as a direct result of the SSA process, should not be under-estimated. The degree of stretch then contained in the proposed SSA actions is largely a function of where the sector started from. There are a number of sectors in which much of the SSA focus is on providing a foundation for a sector to take forward the skills agenda. This may be in the form providing fairly targeted business

support and capacity building (e.g. Automotive Skills; GoSkills; Skillfast-UK; Improve) or general upskilling actions for the workforce (e.g. GoSkills; Lantra; SkillsActive). In the logistics sector, for example, there was little uniform notion of 'a sector' as such, so that the focus for SSA development has been on building sector identity as a precursor to improving understanding of the sector – and the proposed solutions reflect this (e.g. the focus on a professional development stairway to embed, formalise and promote consistency in how employers approach skills development).

SSCs have been limited in being able to pin down concrete actions by an extensive reliance on partners. It has become increasingly apparent that partners would not or could not commit to some of the more substantial actions envisaged by SSCs and their employers, especially where the case was being made for shifts in the public funding of provision. This partly reflects the realities of policy-making and that the SSA input could only ever be one voice or a single source of intelligence into the policy mix. Without any real levers for change – the SfBn (both SSCs and SSDA) have tended for the most part to be reactive and accommodating of stakeholders requirements. Being an authoritative voice of industry is insufficient. There have been systemic blockages that have restricted the potential for the SfBn to achieve influence:

- For the most part, there are no collective mechanisms to influence employer investment available to SSCs.
- Funding for public provision in skills development is linked to separate planning processes that SSCs can only influence indirectly.
- Decision-making is increasingly focused on the nations and regions, where there are parallel sets of organisations undertaking equivalent dialogue and SSC involvement is variable.

The lack of identified resource for implementing – or even for testing – SSA solutions has meant that SSCs have had to rely on piecemeal sources of funding for implementation (e.g. in England, taking advantage of LSC discretionary funding). The LSC itself is still developing its notion of what a demand-led system will look like. The SSA has had an important input in this context, but it has been limited by a lack of focus in the initial specification for the agreements on how implementation would work in practice.

Some partners point out that they simply have not been convinced by the substance of some SSA arguments, especially when they are framed (or seemingly framed) in terms of a notion of increasing public investment in skills development for a given sector. While, as noted earlier, there is consensus about the underpinning 'story' presented through SSA LMI, this does not, in the majority of cases, translate into consensus about the proposed policy prescription contained in the SSA reports. However, the sheer volume of potential SSA solutions and the lack of substantial 'deals' also shows that there is something more fundamental acting as a block on achieving an SSA-derived step forward in skills provision and investment.

The limited scope for action has led to a pragmatic focus on what is achievable and action plans that are a hook for the activities SSCs have responsibility for anyway. In short, the SSA solutions have followed the funding. This is to some extent a subversion of the SSA process and it has in some cases – especially in the nations context – left SSCs exposed in terms of a perceived disjuncture between the evidence and the proposed solutions. We

heard numerous comments from stakeholders in the nations especially questioning the veracity of solutions such as academies and skills passports that were considered to be opportunistic. Yet SSCs have been forced to focus attention on where they have access to the levers for change. This is a logic, rational approach, defined by a number of SSCs as achieving 'quick wins'.

Table 3.3 Overview of SSA Priority Actions

Focus	Actions
Networking and influencing activities	
The employer voice (shaping policy)	<p>e-skills UK: Ensure the IT qualifications structure and approach to recognising achievement is fit for purpose and meets employer needs; Ensure that all policy and action on IT-related skills is underpinned by authoritative insight and market intelligence.</p> <p>Energy & Utility Skills: Government Policy: National and Devolved administrations' policy; Regulation.</p> <p>Lantra: Influencing governments and their agencies for the benefit of the sector; Help shape governments' policies for the benefit of the sector; Maximise public investment in skills and business development for the sector;</p> <p>SkillsActive: Match supply to demand (22 aims).</p>
Funding and skills planning	<p>GoSkills: Funding for Self-Employed (8 actions); Funding of Pre-employment Cabin Crew Qualifications in England (6 actions).</p> <p>People 1st: Qualifications and funding: Ensure the right qualifications attract the right funding;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Informing the National Planning and Funding System (NPFS),</p> <p>SkillsActive: Redirect funding for training (12 aims).</p>
Promoting employer investment in skills development	<p>ConstructionSkills: Increasing the Number of Companies Investing in Training;</p> <p>Improve: 'Sweet Success'– ensuring that skills are seen as THE key success factor. A programme enhancing the industry's strategic view of skills, as a means of raising productivity and not merely as a minimum legal requirement;</p> <p>Skills for Health: Develop mechanisms to strengthen employer commitment and engagement with the skills agenda;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Raising the demand for training, skills development and learning in the sector; Promote to Employers the Business Case for Training;</p> <p>SkillsActive: Increase sector investment in people (23 aims).</p>
Networking	<p>Improve: 'Learning Together'– ensuring that collaboration gets a chance. Actions to promote regional and sub-regional co-operation and collaboration on skills issues amongst sector SMEs, who lack their own suitable in-house training facilities.</p> <p>Skills for Health: Strengthen partnership working.</p>
Tackling priority skill needs and gaps	
Management and leadership skills	<p>Automotive Skills: Better managers and stronger leaders working more efficiently and effectively;</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Developing Management and Leadership Skills;</p> <p>GoSkills: Management and leadership (12 actions);</p> <p>Lantra: Better managers; better businesses;</p> <p>People 1st: Management & leadership: Sector specific and continuous development;</p> <p>Semta (EEA): Management development; Leadership development; (Marine): Management Development; People Skills among Managers; Supervisors and Team Leaders need management skills;</p> <p>Skillfast-UK: Management and leadership development;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Reduce Management Skills Gaps.</p>
Generic, employability and basic skills	<p>Automotive Skills: Generic Skills: Employees embracing customer focus, talking, listening, and solving problems;</p> <p>Basic/Core Skills: Numeracy, literacy, and ICT; Employability Skills: Helping to ensure that potential employees have the right attitudes and motivations;</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Achieving employability for life – on-site (Wales);</p> <p>GoSkills: Skills of numeracy and literacy (7 actions);</p> <p>Semta (EEA): Upskilling to NVQ/SVQ Levels 2 and 3; (Marine): Training for Multi-skilling and Cross-skilling; Basic Skills (Skills for Life) for new recruits to allow development; Candidates well-equipped with knowledge of mathematics;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Basic Skills, Improve the Basic Skills Levels.</p>
IT / technology skills	<p>e-skills UK: Preparing the future workforce: Improve the relevance of learning in preparation for IT professional careers; Prepare future business managers with the skills to thrive in the e-economy; Enable all students at all stages to improve their skills in the use of IT;</p> <p>GoSkills: IT skills and provision (4 actions);</p> <p>Semta (Marine): Self led Teams creates the need for IT skills among crafts people;</p> <p>Skillfast-UK: Graduate-level skills in design and technology.</p>
Customer service	<p>GoSkills: Skills for dealing with passengers (13 actions);</p> <p>People 1st: Customer service: Gold standard customer service campaign – “getting our experience right”.</p>
Language	Skills for Logistics: Support Bilingual Training Provision (Wales).

Targeted programmes to tackle specific skills gaps and shortages	<p>Automotive Skills: Technical Skills: Up-to-date technicians keeping pace with developments and technology;</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Developing Skills for Sustainability; Developing Flexible Training Structures for Specialist Occupations; New training opportunities for specialists; Increase access to & provision of training for specialist sectors;</p> <p>Energy & Utility Skills: Renewable Energy Strategy (Scotland only).</p> <p>GoSkills: Driver CPC (19 actions);</p> <p>Semta (EEA): Improving craft supply at level 3 through upskilling; Meeting the demand for craft and technician development (Engineering Technicians); Improving the supply of technicians at Level 4; Tackling graduate skill deficiencies; Increasing the proportion of graduates in the workforce; A specialist degree programme to meet specific needs; More young licensed aircraft engineers to replace retirees; Semta (Marine): Falling number of graduates in naval architecture and in mechanical, electrical and marine engineering; Graduates able to use new technologies for cutting edge design and processes;</p> <p>Skillfast-UK: Supply of technical skills at operative and craft / technician level;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Impact of EU Directives on Driver CPC; Increase the number of Good Quality LGV Drivers.</p>
Business support	
Business improvement	<p>Improve: Promoting Productivity - ensuring a competitive and sustainable sector. A programme designed to enable companies and employees to adopt the continuous improvement and lean manufacturing skills that are right for them (e.g. smart logistics, waste minimisation, and energy saving);</p> <p>Lantra: Improving business performance: Engage employers in skills and business development;</p> <p>Semta (EEA): Productivity and Competitiveness; Supply Chain Development; Continuous Process Improvement; Capital Investment; Reduction in New Product and Process Development and Implementation (NPPDI) Time;</p> <p>SkillsActive: Improve the quality and range of services to attract more customers and participants (22 aims).</p>
Skills brokerage & Training Needs Assessment	<p>Cogent: Competence Assurance: Making it Safe (PROTECHS): A competence assurance framework that enables companies to assess their systems and procedures against an industry standard and to assess and understand their level of competence;</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Encourage employers to take an active role in addressing the training needs of the industry; Increase the productivity levels of industry;</p> <p>Improve: Connecting the Industry – ensuring good employability skills. Existing skills brokerage arrangements across England need enhancement in order to fully understand and meet the needs of the food and drink sector;</p> <p>People 1st: Supporting small businesses: Sector specific signposting of the best available support;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Explore Innovative Approaches to Business Skills and Training Support,</p> <p>Skillset: Supporting Small Businesses; Freelancers.</p>
HR Processes & organisation	<p>Automotive Skills: Sector wide Issues: Helping ensure examples of good recruitment, HR and training best practice are made available to all.</p> <p>GoSkills: Releasing employees to train can be an issue (9 actions);</p> <p>Improve: Training – ensuring that the sector can look after its own. Aims to support and encourage structured approaches to training and development in the workplace;</p> <p>Semta (Marine): Workforce Development Planning Skills;</p> <p>Skillfast-UK: In-company training capacity;</p> <p>Skills for Health: Promote innovative skills development solutions.</p>
Recruitment and retention	
Career pathways	<p>Cogent: Cogent Career Pathways: This will demonstrate career paths include job profiles for the roles identified, specify qualifications required for each role, and include case studies and film of role models;</p> <p>Improve: Careers Development – ensuring that we have a smart food & drink sector. Programmes designed to address skills shortages from a number of disciplines for entry into and progression within the sector;</p> <p>People 1st: Attracting high quality people: Developing high calibre entry routes.</p>

General recruitment and retention activities, including: - Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) activities - Sector reputation and promotion - Improving the supply of labour entering the sector	<p>ConstructionSkills: Increasing Applications for Construction Related Courses; Cash for undergraduate drive; Improve the image of, and change the culture of the industry; Stepping up the Quality of Qualified New Entrants: Improving Understanding of Career Opportunities in Construction</p> <p>e-skills UK: Improving the attractiveness of IT careers: Transform the attitudes of girls towards IT-related careers; Improve careers guidance and establish work in IT as an aspirational career choice for high achievers;</p> <p>Energy & Utility Skills: Sector Recruitment and Attractiveness: Sustainable Schools Strategy; Careers Project (Northern Ireland);</p> <p>GoSkills: GoSkills: Retention (3 actions); Sector Image (16 actions); Demographics (2 actions: attracting youth);</p> <p>Improve: 'A Future in Food' – ensuring that potential employees are aware of the sector's potential. A programme to promote career opportunities, entry and progression routes, to ensure skills deficiencies are met;</p> <p>Lantra: Raising the quality of entrants to the sector: Facilitate entry into employment; Make the land-based sector a positive career choice for all;</p> <p>Semta (EEA): Workforce Planning and Recruitment: Developing strategies and programmes to maximise recruitment into the sectors (through development of academic routes, postgraduate entry, diploma and work-based learning);</p> <p>Skillfast-UK: Information, advice and guidance; Recruitment and retention.</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Developing the Image of the Sector,</p> <p>SkillsActive: Improve recruitment and retention of paid and volunteer workers (22 aims);</p> <p>Skillset: Information, Advice & Guidance for Learning & Work (Actions: 4 in England, 4 in Scotland, 6 in Wales).</p>
Diversifying the workforce profile	<p>ConstructionSkills: Improving diversity within the industry, through Local Employment and Training Projects; Promote the construction industry to a diverse range of potential new entrants ; Construction: a positive career choice for all; Using construction employment projects to attract atypical recruits;</p> <p>Energy & Utility Skills: Sector Recruitment and Attractiveness: Diversity;</p> <p>People 1st: Broadening the appeal of the sector: A new head start for diverse labour pools.</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Diversity, Research Barriers to Learning which Impact on Diversity Levels.</p>
Migrant workers	<p>ConstructionSkills: Assisting the Effective Integration of Migrant Workers; Integrating migrant labour to bridge the skills gaps; Assess the numbers of and skills requirements of migrant workers;</p> <p>Lantra: Realise the full potential of migrants in the workforce;</p>
Developing provision & qualifications	
Accreditation & unitisation (especially in the context of actions to 'qualify' or professionalise the workforce)	<p>Cogent: Upskill: A clearly defined product and methodology that allows existing employees skills to be easily recognised and gaps filled to allow accreditation against the national standards and NVQ's.</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Intensifying and Widening the Industry's Qualifying the Workforce Initiative; Qualify the existing workforce to a minimum NVQ level 2;</p> <p>GoSkills: Skills not recognised by qualifications (13 actions);</p> <p>Improve: 'Pick and Mix' - ensuring flexibility and adaptability. A strategy which helps employers recognise the achievement of employees, through the use of units which lead to customised qualifications that suit the skills needs of the individual and the employer's business;</p> <p>Lantra: Recognise and increase the skills of the entire workforce; Value fully the contribution of volunteers.</p> <p>SkillsActive: Professionalise and Up-skill the existing workforce (19 aims).</p>
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	<p>ConstructionSkills: Supporting Life Long Learning in Construction (England, Scotland, Wales); 2.5. Develop a culture of continuous learning and upskilling (Northern Ireland);</p> <p>e-skills UK: Create effective Continuing Professional Development opportunities for IT professionals, with particular focus on smaller companies; Address the skills needed for business managers – especially of smaller companies – to realise the benefits of IT; Equip people with the increasingly sophisticated skills needed to use IT effectively in their day to day work;</p> <p>Lantra: Promote lifelong learning to increase professionalism, productivity and profit</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Business Case for Continuous Professional Development.</p>
Improving supply side capacity & quality	<p>ConstructionSkills: Provide adequate training for the 2,600 new entrants each year to 2010 (Northern Ireland).</p> <p>GoSkills: Capacity of Trainers and Assessors (12 actions);</p> <p>Energy & Utility Skills: Skills Provision: Review Adequacy of Capacity/ Supply; Review Adequacy of Supply: Micro-generation; Skills Provision; Waste Management Basic/ Essential Skills; Higher Education in Workforce Development;</p> <p>Lantra: Ensure a sustainable, high quality network of learning providers;</p> <p>People 1st: World class skills delivery: A national skills programme in an aspirational world;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Quality of Training Supply; Improve Provider Quality and Capacity Issues,</p> <p>Skillset: Schools Base Provision; 2. Further and Higher Education.</p>
New courses & qualifications	<p>Semta (Marine): There are no qualifications in Marine Surveying within UK qualifications frameworks;</p> <p>Skillfast-UK: International trade and the supply chain (new qualification)</p>

Qualification reform & supply side infrastructure	<p>ConstructionSkills: Construction Qualifications Strategy (England).</p> <p>Skillfast-UK: Qualifications infrastructure;</p> <p>Skills for Health: Establish modern and consistent qualification and quality assurance frameworks and assessments;</p> <p>Skills for Logistics: Support Qualification Delivery; Regional Delivery Model for the Skills for Logistics sector (in Wales).</p>
National occupational standards & competency development	<p>Energy & Utility Skills: Competence: Waste Management Certificate of Technical Competency; Waste Management Health and Safety; Upstream Gas; Downstream Gas; Water; Water Competent Operators; Network Construction/Multi-utility; Management and Leadership; Electricity Occupational and Functional Map; Electricity Feasibility (North East, Yorkshire and Humberside); National Occupational Standards Review (Scotland); Up-Skilling Adult Staff (Northern Ireland);</p> <p>People 1st: Chefs: Universal industry standards of professional training established; Industry code of practice: Raising the basic standards in commercial kitchens;</p> <p>Skills for Health: Progress the development of a UK-wide system of nationally recognised competences.</p>
Apprenticeships	<p>Cogent: 2: Cogent Apprentices: A Cogent Apprenticeship framework owned and managed by Cogent setting a clear and understood standard for our industries.</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Increasing Apprentice Completions and Widening Opportunities for On Site Practice; Increasing apprentice completions by 400% (Wales);</p> <p>Energy & Utility Skills: Sector Recruitment and Attractiveness: Apprenticeships (North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside); Modern Apprenticeships (Scotland); Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Project;</p> <p>Skillset: Introducing Apprenticeships.</p>
5) Products	
Passports & registration schemes	<p>Cogent: Cogent Industry Passports: The passport will address the transient contractor workforce and induction level industry specific skills;</p> <p>ConstructionSkills: Encourage industry registration schemes as a means of ensuring adequate health and safety training for all those employed in the industry (Northern Ireland).</p> <p>People 1st: A Single communications channel: UK Skills Passport – a central resource for skills information</p>
Labour market intelligence	<p>ConstructionSkills: Infrastructure to support the other priorities: Improving Intelligence on Skills for the Future;</p> <p>Lantra: Provide a rigorous evidence base on which to make policy and investment decisions;</p> <p>Skills for Health: Develop common UK workforce data systems and information;</p> <p>Semta: Providing intelligence on current demand and supply need;</p> <p>Skillset: Research.</p>

4 SSA DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

This section looks at the SSA development process and at SSA implementation. The development process itself has been much discussed in earlier evaluations¹⁰ and we do not revisit those arguments except to reflect on how the process has evolved over time – especially in the context of different geographic areas. We look at the quality of the development process in terms of its key components:

- The use of research and intelligence to shape employer priorities and the involvement of employers and partners throughout the process to develop agreed actions for the sector.
- The production of ‘SSA outputs’ in terms of the clarity of vision presented and the demonstration of tangible commitments to act.

The section then goes on to look at the issue of SSA implementation, which has become increasingly vexed as more SSCs have reached the end of Stage 5 (the production of the actual agreement). What happens at the point of completion (and even identifying where that point of completion is) is critical to assessing the substantive value of the SSA. It is also now possible to look at the various approaches to managing the implementation and progress to those ends.

4.1 Progress and Issues in the Development of SSAs

4.1.1 *The Evolution of the Development Process*

The mechanics of the SSA development process have become clearer over time, but the concept has fragmented. Many of the issues faced by the pathfinders in terms of scoping the principles of an SSA while actually developing an SSA have been addressed and there are clearer expectations in terms of content, coverage and a clear formula for presenting the agreement.

However, the ambitions and scope of the process have shifted over time. The SSA started as an England-only process. It evolved to become UK-wide in scope. Then, it became structured at the level of the nations (i.e. with an SSA for each nation), and latterly has been pitched in terms of each of the devolved nations and the English regions. This has to some extent reflected shifts in policy – and the increasing focus on the regional agenda. It also partly reflects that gearing up for the SSA took longer in the nations, especially Northern Ireland. Part of the evolution of the SSA has been the programme simply coming on stream UK-wide. However, it has meant that in some cases SSCs are being judged against shifting expectations, which are much more difficult to meet.

Whilst the SSA approach has also evolved over recent years, the research components have remained relatively similar to what was initially anticipated, although the way in which research is packaged and presented has become increasingly focused on nations and

¹⁰ Evaluation of the Pathfinder Sector Skills Agreement Process (SSDA Research Report 15, November 2005); Sector Skills Agreements Implementation Progress Reports (SSDA Research Report 24, July 2007); Skills for Business network: Phase 3 evaluation main report (SSDA: Research Report 19, August 2006).

regions. A simple analysis of the Stage 1 to 3 reports shows that lessons have been shared about the basic requirements of the exercise – i.e. the use of a range of sources and the need to shape the analysis for each geographic area. The SSA development process has, to some extent, been cemented as a research exercise. There are two important conclusions from this:

- Later tranches of SSCs have become more adept at following the process, but question marks about the way in which the process itself is structured have gone largely unanswered. There is universal consensus that the development process has been hampered by its exponential growth. One of the earliest and most repeated findings from SSCs and stakeholders relates to the output-centric focus of the process, with an emphasis on the production of numerous reports. There has been little evidence of ownership (from SSCs, the SSDA or partners) over rationalising the process as it grew.
- While the parameters of the Stage 1 to 3 process have become clearer and a more consistent 'process' has been established (for better or worse), there is much less consistency about the approach, standards and ambitions of the Stage 5 agreement. The SSDA seems to have taken a lighter touch approach to quality assuring the agreements themselves than it did for the research components, rightly according to a number of SSCs. This is potentially problematic because it has the effect of downplaying the focus on the actual agreements in comparison with the earlier research. It does not sit well with the perceived relative importance of the intelligence and agreement phases. For example, one stakeholder pointed out that *'we're not really interested in the research – though its nice to know – the action plan is the interesting bit'*. This was a common stakeholder perspective, but not a universally held one. Paradoxically, much of the most intensive engagement between SSCs and stakeholders as part of the 'formal' SSA development process has centred on LMI.

Increasingly regionalisation of analysis has been partly driven by the relative locus of influence – i.e. where partners and funding operates and the level at which SSA interventions need to happen. Asset Skills, Automotive Skills, Cogent, Energy & Utility Skills, People 1st, SkillsActive and Summitskills have all published skill needs assessments for the English regions. Other SSCs have produced SSA regional reports that remain generally unpublished.

In some cases, such as Summitskills, for example, it is clear from the methods employed (regional workshops with employers) that potential priorities have been determined 'bottom up'. In other cases, a more global analysis has been undertaken and data / examples have been cut for each region. This is a hugely labour-intensive task, but one that shows a responsiveness to the requests of stakeholders who are primarily interested in the regional cut of the intelligence.

The challenge has been that it is very hard to do anything other than develop a template analysis and tailored various data and region-specific text. Much then depends on the skill of the SSC in being able to overlay that regional intelligence – in practice through their regional employer engagement teams. If this is not done effectively, then regional SSA reports and action plans tend not to provide the depth of insight that stakeholders are looking for. A significant number of the critiques of the SSA research reports stem from this.

It echoes earlier concerns in the nations, where the same issue arises. To some extent that position is less marked now in the nations (although some stakeholders in the nations would question that assessment) because so much effort has been placed on developing separate processes for each of the nations. The point made in the SSA pathfinder evaluation, that embedding these separate processes effectively multiplies the task in hand, remains true. To some extent, the additional resource in Scotland and Northern Ireland to support the development of a research base has helped, but it has also served to further embed the separateness of the SSA process in each geographic area.

4.1.2 The evolution of the SSA development process in different geographic areas

The SSA process has therefore evolved differently by geography. There was a widely-held perception in the nations that the process has been 'England-driven', which was certainly the case in the early SSA tranches. Over time, though, partners in the nations have had a far greater impact on the SSA process. The development process has been amended to fit partner needs. For example, in Northern Ireland, there is an important break at Stage 3, which is when sign up is effectively brokered – and done far more so on the basis of the detail of the LMI and its link to proposed priorities than elsewhere

In a sense, the SSA has become de facto redefined across different geographic areas to meet the specific needs and requirements of key stakeholders within these areas. Sometimes this has happened without partners fully buying in to the process itself. This meant that the SSA was being re-shaped in the regions and nations without a clear sense of what was being 'offered' to SSCs and employers.

A number of models have emerged for managing the SSA process in the nations and regions:

- The project board model used in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, in which a core group of stakeholders come together to comment on or quality assure SSA outputs, and to varying extents facilitate sign-up.
- Sector skills productivity alliances, a model used in the North West of England, in which separate groups exist for 20 industries, which are chaired by the SSC and involve partners with specific sectoral interests or responsibilities.
- A bilateral model, evident in London (and other English regions), in which much depends on each SSC having the presence and ability to broker agreement with partners individually.

In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland the project board model has tightened up the whole SSA development process. It has been a sensible way to progress where the number of stakeholders is of a manageable scale to 'get round a table'. Policy evolution in Wales has further emphasised this, with an increasing concentration of skills and employment functions within WAG. It has meant that completing the 'process' is, in some ways, easier in the nations. Some SSCs, such as Skills for Logistics, have published nations SSAs prior England or UK ones.

Having a clear process and protocols is worth little without corresponding buy-in to supporting the outcomes of the SSA process. The SSA as a process is generally now accepted by stakeholders, especially in Scotland (*'this is a big change over the last year or so'* – Scotland-based SfBn interviewee). Reservations remain about the timescale (the

process is seen as slow) and the quality and depth of analysis, but there was a sense for most stakeholders that the process itself was appropriate for Scotland.

In Wales, the development process seems to have been relatively successful as there was both a buy in to the SSA and a manageable scale. SSCs in Wales have been invited to present their early SSA findings – but as a precursor to brokering bilateral discussions with relevant partners. This does not necessarily mean that substantial outcomes have been achieved, but if relationships with partners are at the heart of the SSA, it has been an effective way of moving these discussions forward (where partners had the capacity to respond).

The project board model has, though, created a tier of ‘process’-focused stakeholders who sit on the project boards and commit extensive time for quality assurance and meeting with SSCs. It has also meant that the process becomes, in the words of one SSDA interviewee, ‘heavy-handed’ and impossibly labour intensive for partners expected to comment on each stage of the SSA (*‘the main output for stakeholders should be two sheets of A4’*).

It is still unclear how a lot stakeholders who have invested so much time and resource through the project boards are supporting SSA implementation in practice. This was a source of frustration for some partners who sit on the project boards, but it is partly a failure of ownership over the process from those partners. The development process itself has become the focus to the detriment of its substance – i.e. what it is trying to achieve. One SSC questioned the extent to which the project board model facilitated access to decision-makers: *‘the process forces you to work with people (in partner organisations) that are only empowered to say ‘no’*.

In England, the notion of a ‘virtual project board’ has been widely critiqued as ineffective (by SSCs and stakeholders). It has been replaced by a variety of models at regional and national level to broker engagement, as noted above. Looking at the involvement of a key partner in England, such as the LSC, there has been a shift over time from having a centrally-controlled planning process in which the SSA fed in to a national planning process to a regional one. Over time, SSCs have increasingly had to engage at regional level, which requires a different set of arrangements.

As the SSA has become more ‘localised’, the models for supporting development and engagement become increasingly important. It is clear that the closer the management of the SSA process came to the interests of the people ‘sitting round the table’, the more likely it was that substantial ‘deals’ could be achieved. For example, Cogent in North West of England has been able to influence the direction of the Sector Skills Productivity Alliance (SSPA) for the chemicals industry to align it with emerging SSA themes (so that proposed SSA actions such as careers information and the development of ‘gold standard’ role profiles are taken forward practically in the SSPA plan). The SSPAs in the North West generally are testament to potential of this approach – but it is an expensive approach. For example, each of the 20 groups has administrative support funded by the RDA. This kind of RDA buy-in to the SSA process has been rare, and, arguably, it constitutes the price of success for the SSA model.

Other regions are becoming increasingly formal in how they broker engagement through the SSA. For example, sector surgery days have been introduced in the East of England to enable SSCs to discuss proposed SSA actions with groups of key stakeholders engaged in

the regional skills partnership. The surgery days are still relatively new, but were described by one partner as *'oiling the wheels of implementation'* by clarifying SSC understanding of partner roles and, critically, understanding the differences between partner agendas at the national and regional levels.

4.1.3 Quality of the SSA Development Process

There are two areas in which developing an SSA has led (or potentially led) to an improved debate regarding sector skills:

- The use of research and intelligence – which is the cornerstone of the SSA process – to set employer priorities for skills.
- The involvement of partners and employers throughout a development process as a means of achieving action and consensus about what is required for skills development.

Use of research and intelligence to shape employer priorities

The centrality of research and intelligence to the SSA process has been both a great strength and a significant weakness. The strength of the centrality of LMI to the process is that the Stage 1 to 3 research has attempted to shift the paradigm on how evidence is used. A significant number of the SSCs we spoke to reported the main benefit of the LMI as being a means of challenging employer perspectives:

- *'It (the SSA research) didn't tell us anything we didn't already know – but it was key in persuading employers that retention is as much of an issue in the sector as recruitment'* (SSC Research Director).
- *'It was really useful in evidencing what we already knew anecdotally – and pointing out to employers the issues and their role in resolving them'* (RDA stakeholder).
- *'LMI didn't tell us anything new but was a framework to 'hang things on''* (SSC Country manager).

The weakness has largely related to external relations with partners and their expectations. The drive for high-quality LMI implies some kind *quid pro quo* for SSCs and their employers in terms of the related demand-side influence over skills policy. Yet it is unrealistic to expect a continuous logical flow from the Stage 3 gap analysis to the Stage 5 agreement. Evidence-based policy making can only ever inform the decision-making process – it cannot determine it. Actual decisions will always be constrained by current budgets and systems for delivery across a range of partner organisations. It has proved extremely difficult for SSAs to gain leverage over public sector funders and providers through the power of the argument (i.e. the research and analysis). Ultimately, the SSA is only one input into the policy 'mix' – and it is only over time that the scope (or lack of scope) for potential influence has emerged.

As we noted in the 'State of Play' report, there is a feeling within the SfBn that, in practice, if it is not politically opportune for partners and stakeholders to be 'persuaded' by the LMI evidence, it can easily be batted back. One stakeholder reflected on the situation as follows: *'partners buy into the SfBn remit, but then endlessly chip away at the detail of the LMI'*. The finely grained research and the depth of consultation required may be impossible to achieve – and the SSCs tend to be at the whim of individual stakeholders and groups of

stakeholders within the nations and regions to determine what constitutes acceptable analysis in practice. SSDA and stakeholders use a quality standards framework, alongside their own expectations, to judge outputs. One stakeholder described it as: *'death by a thousand cuts'*.

The use of LMI in the SSA process has helped to define the SSC role. A variety of interviewees (including SSCs) felt that the SSA was over-sold in terms of SSCs being the 'voice of employers' and somehow mandated to define provision when there were clearly few levers for substantial influence available to them. The significant political capital invested in the early SSAs in England contributed to SSCs taking a strong challenge function towards the fundamentals of the skills system and, in some cases, playing a lobbying role that led to the debate being framed in terms of whether SSCs could speak for their sector and the quality of the 'evidence'.

Over time it has become more generally accepted that SSCs should be facilitating a dialogue that goes beyond what employers 'want' to offer something more reflexive. Not all employers will agree with all of the analysis produced by SSCs, but the SSA has been successful in bringing together a complex mix of 'hard' evidence in the form of LMI and industry understanding – so that the most effective SSCs are taking a macro perspective on their sectors rather than simply lobbying for the loudest shouting employers. Through the SSA process, SSCs should be able to understand, explain and interpret the perspectives of a heterogenous employer voice. This should be of immense value in a demand-led system (however that is defined).

There are, however, institutional/systemic issues relating to employer engagement that the SSA has not caused but has shone a light on. Critics of the SSA have been able to take parts of that heterogenous employer voice – be it SMEs or individual major employers and use it to undermine SSC credibility (i.e. the picture presented is not universal enough). The SSA has, by its very nature, forced a degree of summation of the demand-side picture – which is necessary as part of a process to 'make sense' of the skills picture for a sector.

Conversely, SSCs have also been challenged for not making enough of sector distinctiveness. The Education and Skills Select Committee reported in July 2007 that a *'fundamental concern is the capacity of Sector Skills Councils, as small organisations covering large, internally complex sectors, to go beyond a 'lowest common denominator' approach to representing employer needs'*¹¹. In the context of the SSA, it seems that SSCs have, if anything, generally tended to anchor the process at sub-sector level. This has been one of the reasons why the sectoral and geographic interplay in the context of the SSA has been so difficult to manage. The real issue is that an over-emphasis on the robustness of the LMI has to some extent forced SSCs to work in broad-brush terms.

Involvement of partners and employers throughout the development process

Significant progress has been made to establish employer and partner engagement mechanisms as part of the SSA process. It has forced SSCs to develop a infrastructure for employer engagement across the UK, which has been a major step forward. Much has depended on both the starting point of each SSC and the culture of employer engagement

¹¹ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee: Post-16 Skills, Ninth Report of Session 2006–07, 23 July 2007

and investment in skills within each sector. Those SSCs that have made the greatest progress, such as Skillset, have been able to mobilise employers through their industry panels (having not only a culture of employer engagement but a well-established infrastructure as well). Others have had to focus a great deal of their energy on getting skills on the agenda for a cross-section of employers through the SSA process.

One SSC described an iterative process of involving different types of employer in a high-quality dialogue:

“The SSA has made us more responsive to employers and given us a deeper understanding of broader employer issues. We were originally criticised for only dealing with large employers and on the SSA we had to start with them because they were the only ones able to answer the question “where will you be in 20 years time”. But the SSA process has allowed us to take those findings regionally and drill down to smaller businesses....has let us go in front of smaller employers – often parts of the supply chain – and let us say, “this is what your major customers are saying. What does it mean for you?””

In terms of involving stakeholders throughout the development process, the experience has been mixed. One of the main lessons from the SSA has been the importance of developing early relationships with key stakeholders to discuss potential SSA solutions and ensure that potential actions were joined up – i.e. that the SSC had accounted for where proposed actions sat in terms of current policy and what the resource implications were. Some SSCs have done this very effectively, but it still seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Overall, there has not been a significant shift in the point at which partners are first being engaged in the SSA process. There are two possible reasons for this. First, in some geographic areas, the process has become so formalised that a rich dialogue with partners is made more difficult. Second, the later tranches of SSA development arguably include a larger number of SSCs with limited capacity to engage.

A number of SSC staff, especially in the nations and regions, reflected that going beyond the core set of stakeholders was challenging because the SSA still lacks the profile necessary to facilitate discussion. Government may have signed up to the process corporately, but this meant little when discussion was attempted with sector-specific departmental partners.

The development process has also extended over such a long period that some key stakeholders have seemingly lost interest (according to SSCs), although there are also a number of stakeholders, especially in the nations, who seem to increasingly see the value over time. Initially the support from the then DfES in England was critical to establishing the SSA. This engagement and support seems to have dwindled (according to SSCs and in terms of agreement content). This has continued through the evolution to DIUS/DCSF. The perceived disengagement has been a major issue for SSCs that did not have a ‘home’ in a different sponsoring department. There have also been examples of departments (e.g. DTI/BERR and parts of the Scottish Executive/Scottish Government) that were less engaged in the SSA process, but were very vocal about the importance of the quality of the SSA when it related to what were perceived as key sectors.

At least some of the elongation of SSA development has been the result of a desire to meet the expectations of partners. Yet the extended nature of the process has enabled some

partners who potentially see the SSCs as competition (especially in Scotland and the English regions) to initially contest the role of SSCs, then tacitly sign up to support and engage, before reflecting that a four-year development cycle itself shows the SSA as too bureaucratic to be fit for purpose. Failure in this context arguably becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

On top of this, there is still a lack of stakeholder consensus about how the process should work. Stakeholders within the same geographic area make critiques of SSA outputs that are mutually exclusive, which shows that the agreements are still not being judged on a consistent basis. One stakeholder criticises the Stage 1 and 2 reports generally for being too generic (*'they read like annual reports of the labour market with very little to differentiate them.....they are chasing a template'*). Another stakeholder reported that *'each SSA has a different format, so it is hard to see where the SSC is coming from'*. As much as anything, this shows the difficulty of introducing a process that is going to satisfy all stakeholders within a given geographic area. Arguably, the risks associated with perceptions of SSAs being generic (and, as a consequence, not adding value) are far greater than those associated with having a multitude of different approaches.

4.1.4 Quality of SSA Outputs

Clarity of vision

All SSCs have been able to identify key priorities for action within their agreements. These priorities tend to be pitched at a fairly high level, meaning that a lot of common themes emerge across different sectors. Arguably, the SSA vision is only really crystallised in terms of the presentation of actions and SSCs fall into two distinct camps here. Some SSCs, such as Cogent and People 1st, have presented a small number of main actions (e.g. what Cogent calls its five 'big ticket items'). Skills for Logistics has three main objectives underpinning its action plan in order to make the SSA comprehensible and easy to retain. Others, such as Lantra and SkillsActive, presented more detailed action plans. This makes it more difficult to encapsulate the major messages contained in the SSA, but it means that more sub-sector attuned actions can be included.

Overall, stakeholders report that the SSA outputs are confusing or inaccessible. Even one SSC chief executive, referring to SSAs in general, said that *'the outputs are unreadable'*. According to most stakeholders and SSCs involved in SSAs, the full reports did not actually have a substantial target audience in practice. This is why it is so important to separate the SSA as process and a 'product'.

Yet judgements about the various SSAs – especially from stakeholders – tend to inextricably link process and product. One stakeholder in Scotland felt that *'good SSCs don't give you too much information. They don't bombard you. They give the impression that they are strategic, not fire fighting'*. Lantra, ConstructionSkills, Skillset and Skills for Justice were all reported as being 'very good' in this context. These are some of the SSCs with greatest geographic reach and capacity, which is undoubtedly a precursor to effective SSA engagement across the UK. It may be, though, that SSCs who have been more stretched actually compensated for their limited resource by producing 'more information', something that in practice disengaged stakeholders.

Inaccessibility of SSA outputs tends to relate to the sheer volume of reports and is also a function of SSCs having multiple action plans. SSA reports are available to a varying extent on the SSDA's website, but they are sometimes hard to access even via individual SSC websites. People 1st, for example, is yet to publish an SSA as such, but instead have included the substantial content in a skills strategy for England. ConstructionSkills, has downplayed its SSA as a *report*, instead using the material as a project tool tailed to specific activities.

A number of stakeholders who had been heavily involved in the SSA process reported that the quality of the SSA – as an output – was no predictor of SSC performance or delivery. One stakeholder compared an SSC whose SSA was *'just a statement of intent, but they are now taking a practical and proactive approach'*, with another SSC whose SSA was felt to be high-quality *'but we haven't seen them since'*.

Demonstrating tangible and substantial commitments from employers and partners

The demonstration of tangible commitment from partners and employers in SSAs is generally lacking in the SSA outputs. It superficially seems more absent in later tranches of SSA than the pathfinders. The SSA is not a process leading to a deal and a commitment – much less a costed series of actions brokered with partners.

The weaknesses in the SSA rationale are becoming more apparent as increasing numbers of SSCs reach the end of Stage 5. One stakeholder in Scotland felt that *'the idea that SSAs will deliver things is entirely wrong'*. The process in Scotland had been routinised so that the project board agreement becomes a *'bland letter...drawn up along the lines that we agree to talk about things'*. The point was made that *'where there is something to be done we will do it and don't need a signed a agreement'*. This notion of a signed agreement being anathema to Scotland's modus operandi has been consistently made by a range of stakeholders, but there is a more general point that the Scottish experience most clearly highlights in terms of partners' tactical response to Stage 5: *'partners can't be held accountable to the agreement and if they could, it would be even blander'*.

A number of SSCs, such as Energy & Utility Skills, SkillsActive and Skills for Health have developed action plans that distinguish the employer and partner commitment in terms of actions that have been agreed in principle and actions for further discussion. This is preferable to creating actions that fudge a lack of substantial commitment behind more general assertions. A small number of SSAs, including e-skills UK and Energy & Utility Skills include named employers within action plans. This is a good way of showing genuine employer commitment, although it is only workable in certain contexts.

4.2 Progress in the Implementation of SSAs

4.2.1 Reaching the point of SSA completion

The SSA is a process with a long tail. Even after an average 18 months of development, a lot of implementation revolves around further development. In later tranches, the initial notion of 'sign off' has become increasingly blurred, meaning that any break in the process can be notional. This is inevitable given the lack of levers to broker agreements with stakeholders and, for the most part, with employers (as described in sub-section 3.3.2 above). It is not in itself problematic in the context of the wider ambitions of the SSA process, which imply a long-term strategic influencing process, but can prove difficult if

expectations are based around what has proved to be an unrealistic perception of 'hard deals' closing the development process.

Where agreements take the form of memoranda of understanding, they tend to provide the basis for discussion rather than a commitment to act. It also reflects the large volume of potential partners. As one RDA respondent said, *'the publication of the SSA is only the beginning'*. Yet the labour intensity and the length of the process, for SSCs and engaged partners, means that the production of the agreement (however that might be defined) has the perverse sense of being an end point (*'everyone takes a deep breath once the SSA is signed off'* – LSC interviewee). There was a concern voiced by SSDA that many SSCs are not sustaining momentum after the point of sign-off: *'SSCs tend to get to the end of the process and go "phew" – that's finished'*. This as much as anything shows how an over-engineered 'process' has partly overwhelmed its own primary aims.

Conversely, where the infrastructure is in place, it is possible to begin implementation before the formal SSA process is complete. In the North West, as SSCs develop their regional action plans with the SSPA, the SSAs can start to impact from the end of Stage 3. One stakeholder in the region reported that: *'you do not need a Stage 5 report in order for things to start happening.....when they've done Stage 3 that is when they are in a better position to tell us what we need to know for taking decisions on provision and developing new courses'*. One SSC estimated that: *'our SSA in the North West is probably about 50% delivered even though it is not signed off yet. It's really good news. Over 18 months we've been able to look at potential solutions and create what happens next. The SSA process has added weight to our work in the regions.'*

There are three aspects to actually implementing the SSA:

- managing and co-ordinating implementation;
- monitoring progress;
- and communicating progress.

4.2.2 Managing and co-ordinating SSA implementation: 'delivering' the Agreement

The SSA was envisaged as an agreement between a range of stakeholders and employers, with the strong implication that that each actor 'signing up' to the SSA would take forward part of the agreed programme (or do so jointly). The management of SSA implementation in practice is vexed because it was not anticipated that SSCs would be delivery agents for most actions. Yet they have de facto become so in many contexts. The SSA process was not structured to be able to promote widespread ownership in the majority of cases (once again, this relates to the lack of levers for change within the SSA process). There was extensive partner involvement, but often at a relatively removed level – for example, commenting on proposed actions. In some contexts, there seems to be a feeling that the SSA is broadly shaped around producing a programme for SSCs to deliver (in Northern Ireland, for example). The few cases where something akin to joint ownership was developed (e.g. People 1st's work with DCMS) tended to require an existing set of policy drivers for partnership working.

The focus on being the main SSA delivery agent leaves SSCs with two avenues for implementation. First, they can take forward actions within their control and capacity. This channels activity towards the development of standards and qualifications, further

intelligence gathering and employer engagement. The point is that these activities could and would have been pursued anyway, which is why a minority of SSCs seem to feel that the SSA process has been a distraction (although whether these activities would have been as successful or feasible without the SSA is an important question considered in *Section 5*).

Second, SSCs can use the SSA discussions and evidence as a starting point for accessing funding, although this is often small-scale and piecemeal. It is a source of some frustration for SSC operational staff that SSA partnerships and sign-up often count for little in formalising seemingly agreed actions. Implementation in this context becomes a series of attempts to make partner commitments (and to less of an extent employer commitments) stick.

In terms of what happens when the SSA is published, a number of approaches have become apparent, which are not mutually exclusive:

- ***Subsuming the SSA in wider SSC activity and planning:*** The SSA is perceived as a contractual arrangement with the SSDA and is downplayed as a process and of itself, for example, with SSA 'inputs' appearing in a separate sector skills strategy (e.g. People 1st). This is way of reasserting control over the SSA process and aligning it with the perceived needs of the sector, especially in terms of how the strategy is presented and managed. The risk here is one of accountability and the difficulty in monitoring progress.
- ***A project tool:*** ConstructionSkills described its SSA as a resource, or project tool. In that context the agreements with partners (16 were flagged up in Wales) simply define roles and provide a 'mission statement' on partnership that can be quickly operationalised in the context of a given project (e.g. if a major new housing development is announced). This is a very practical approach but, once again, it means that the agreement itself becomes fairly diffuse.
- ***SSA as a staging post for partnership working:*** For a significant number of SSCs, implementation is an on-going process of further partner and employer discussion to bottom out the priority actions that have been agreed to determine timescales and responsibilities (e.g. Lantra). This is a component part of all SSAs.
- ***SSA as the basis for determining a joint programme of work:*** Where the SSA has been able to pin down more substantial action (e.g. e-skills UK), implementation can be structured around a series of defined projects or actions towards clearly-defined outcomes. This is the 'classic model' of SSA implementation but it is rarely seen.

There is greater consistency in SSCs' approach to implementing the SSA within nations and regions. Typically, responsibility for managing implementation is devolved to the SSC's nations or regions manager as the person with the on-the-ground links to take proposed actions forward. The main difficulty here is one of scale and capacity. SSAs for the regions and nations vary in the extent to which they are shaped around UK-derived priority actions. Across the board, though, there is a mirroring within each geographic area of the number and range of agreed actions, which generally bears no relation to the number of staff the SSC has in place.

Most nations and regions managers testified to the importance of the SSA as defining their programmes of work. In practice, this means that nations and regions managers are having to be selective in terms of which actions are implemented (*'I'll pick up an action for each*

industry (sub-sector) this year' - SSC Northern Ireland manager). The SSA effectively becomes a menu of options for implementation – the decisions on which are significantly driven by what is achievable.

4.2.3 Monitoring progress with SSA actions

Given the diffuse nature of SSA implementation and its multiple dimensions (geographic; sub-sectors), it is important that SSCs and their partners have robust systems in place for tracking and reporting on progress. This is challenging for the significant number of SSCs who have either not published the full set of partner agreements or who have not pinned down substantial actions. A substantial action in this context may be defined as something that is time-bound, measurable, considers resources and has a clear outline of responsibilities.

Given the rigour of scrutiny (from SSDA and key partners) over the SSA development stages, the more fluid nature of monitoring over implementation is surprising. This may reflect the continuing focus on development and achieving SSAs for all 25 SSCs. It also reflects a genuine lack of clarity about ownership over implementation.

In practice, three dimensions to monitoring SSA implementation are apparent:

- **Regulation of the SSC:** There is scope for monitoring by the SfBn regulator (currently SSDA) through the SSC contracting procedure, although this cannot be the main site for monitoring SSA implementation in itself. The focus is on ensuring that each SSC is delivering on its responsibilities, which could be defined in terms of the 'core offer' of any SSA (LMI development and refreshment; standards and qualifications development; employer and stakeholder engagement and mobilisation). There is likely to be a change in the operation of this aspect of monitoring with the introduction of the UK Commission for Employment & Skills (UKCES) in Spring 2008. One of the main difficulties in the past is that the SSA has been de-coupled from the sector-specific objectives and targets (known as Table 1) stated in the SSC core funding contract, partly because the cycle between the three-year SSC contracting and the timetable for SSA development were out-of-synch. Over time, there have been moves to integrate these aspects within the SSDA (e.g. the restructuring of some of the SSA partnership team into the performance directorate in 2006). This is likely to be an important dimension to the SSC re-licensing process.
- **SSC monitoring and evaluation:** SSC approaches to monitoring SSA implementation tend to be through the SSC infrastructure of employer groups. Skillset in Wales, for example, reports on progress on a quarterly basis to its industry panel. A number of SSCs reported that the SSA was a standing item on the agenda of employer board meetings. Even now, too few SSAs have been in place long enough to draw conclusions on how effective this monitoring is. There is also a tendency for the SSA to become subsumed within general SSC business planning, which means that it is not monitored as a 'thing in itself'. This is a logical conclusion to the idea, put forward by many SSCs, that the SSA should underpin everything they do and become the organisational business plan. It is a sensible position but potentially has the effect of subsuming the SSA as a public agreement outwith the SSC itself within the SSC's monitoring of its own activities.

- **Partner monitoring:** SSDA and SSC monitoring both have a role to play, but are limited to the extent to which they can sustain momentum across a partnership. For this reason, monitoring at partnership-level is crucial for successful implementation. It is also the hardest part to engineer and cannot be imposed *on top of* the SSA process – it has to be built up *through the process*. In essence, effective partner monitoring depends on a shared set of expectations and defined responsibilities emerging as part of the development of the SSA itself. Some progress has been evident here. In Wales, for example, a contractor has recently been appointed to provide updates on each SSA through checkpoint reviews. This was instigated partly because there was a gap in information about implementation. Other geographic areas may benefit from such an approach. Partner monitoring is a delicate issue and needs to be framed carefully. To the extent that it has happened so far, it has been driven by the SSDA outside of the SSA process. The current annual partner monitoring report was felt to be problematic by partners themselves: *‘we fill in a template about the SSCs. That means it is not a partnership because they don’t do that about us. Also, the template asks us to fill in headings that aren’t relevant to us – do you engage on ‘x’ and when we say no then the (nations) manager gets into trouble. That can create tensions’*. The ambition has been the creation of a partnership review model that sticks, but that implies shared ownership; something that cannot in any circumstances be derived by the SSC alone. A government stakeholder involved in the People 1st SSA in England noted that: *‘Ultimately People 1st don’t have the authority to stop RDAs or local authorities developing their own solutions. The challenge is to persuade everyone to sign up to the evidence-based, demand-led agenda that the SSA has presented’*. Most importantly in this context, a *‘new Monitoring and Implementation group is potentially influential here’*. It is jointly chaired by the Tourism Minister and the SSC CEO and involves an RDA Chair. This influence was felt to be critical in bringing partners to the table and keeping them there.

4.2.4 Communicating progress with SSA implementation

SSA outputs do not, as a rule, reflect progress with implementation. Semta and e-skills UK, two of the pathfinders, have both produced SSA update reports, but are in the minority. There is no general sense that later tranches of SSC will follow suit, although some may do so. Skills for Logistics reflected what seems to be a common viewpoint in describing its SSA as: *‘a working document’*. The notion is that it feeds into and underpins SSC business planning and priorities going forward. For many SSCs, the two processes are synonymous. The key difference is that an SSA is intended as a public commitment or statement of direction of travel on skills, while a business plan may have a more limited or internal audience.

A number of respondents reported that the SSA brand lacks general recognition (*‘it should have the same resonance as liP’* – employer), which would facilitate employer engagement. One SSC nations manager lamented a lack of a general marketing campaign by the SSDA relating to SSAs, although such campaigns were undertaken in the past. This is interesting because in the minds of some senior SSC staff there is a reluctance to use the SSA brand, feeling that it has been damaged in the eyes of employers as not being able to deliver the commitments from supply side partners that were ‘promised’ and becoming a generally bureaucratic process. The SSDA decided against resourcing more general marketing because of the lack of consensus within the SfBn regarding the communication of the SSA

brand. Some SSCs have undoubtedly pulled back from emphasising their SSA implementation – which raises questions about the future of the process. This goes beyond a question of the SSA brand, though, to include SSA content (i.e. progress with actions). Either way, the communication of progress with SSA implementation remains a major gap.

5 IMPACT

This section assesses the impact of the SSA. It first outlines the key factors for understanding impact (and the limits to quantifying, measuring and reporting on impact). We then look at several dimensions to SSA impact, which relate to our underpinning evaluation framework: the impact on relationships with partners, relationships with employers and uses of LMI specifically. We discuss success and outcomes both in terms of 'direct' SSA impact and indirect impacts through other SSC activities.

5.1 Understanding SSA Impact

It is important to first define what an SSA actually constitutes in practice in order to understand impact. We noted in our earlier State of Play analysis that as SSAs became a tangible reality, they developed a number of additional features. They expanded to become a 'product' and to encapsulate the entire role of the new SSCs. This required of even the newest SSCs, organisational cultures and behaviours that were fit for the over-arching SfBn aims of being the employer voice on skills, recognised intelligence holders and effective influencing bodies. The SSA can therefore be seen as a journey undertaken by each of the SSCs rather than an end in itself. It is *both* a tangible product and a wider, ongoing process of agreement and change.

Disentangling SSA impact is also difficult for the following reasons:

- Timing;
- Partial perspectives on the SSA from individual respondents;
- The interplay between SSA impact and the defined responsibilities of SSCs (i.e. the scope for 'real' impact);
- The nature of SSA impact;
- Differing expectations of impact and what constitutes success.

5.1.1 *Timing*

Even though around two-thirds of the SfBn could be said to have an SSA in place, only four SSAs have been in place for more than a year. In the estimation of SSCs, employers and stakeholders, the SSA is a long-term process. Even over the last year, there have been significant policy evolutions that are impacting on the SSA, especially the implementation of the Leitch recommendations and the development of new skills strategies for Scotland and Wales that redefine the scope of sector skills working. Qualifications reform, which bears a strong link to the SSA, is on-going. Most importantly, substantial strategic impact takes time. Numerous SSCs explicitly and unapologetically focus on 'quick wins', while laying the groundwork for longer-term success. This means that impact to date tends to focus on specific types of action.

5.1.2 *Partial perspectives*

The scope of SSA impact is not necessarily understood by key protagonists (partners and employers) because the process does not exist in a vacuum. Some significant impacts were based on discussions that pre-dated or were held in parallel with the process – making it

difficult (and to some extent unrealistic) to ascribe them as ‘new’ SSA developments. Many SSCs have sensibly managed the SSA so that employers and stakeholders are not overly-exposed to the process itself, so it is very difficult for employers and stakeholders to say what is and what is not SSA-related. As one SSC lead in Northern Ireland said: ‘*we rarely used the term SSA with employers; we know it would be a turn-off*’. The exceptions to this are the core partners (e.g. project board members) who often know the process and nothing else. There is also no uniform SSA experience. Those partners who could talk substantively about SSAs across a range of sectors (relatively few in number) made significant distinctions between SSAs in terms of progress and the potential for impact (‘*80% are good*’; ‘*a third are good*’).

5.1.3 The interplay between SSA impact and SSC defined responsibilities

As noted earlier, the areas of most substantial impact have tended to relate to the most tangible areas of SSC responsibility – qualifications, NOS, LMI, careers information (as shown earlier in Table 3.3). The SSAs to some extent reflect this, further reinforcing the notion of tangible impact occurring where the SSCs have most traction. Again, this is to be expected given the available levers for influence. To some extent, the scope of impact is therefore partly pre-determined. For example, Cogent described its distillation of the SSA intelligence and analysis into five priority actions as focusing on areas that it could both have an effect on and do uniquely.

5.1.4 The nature of SSA impact

Our interviews reinforced earlier findings that the SSA added value so far has been about positioning – relationship development, capacity building, networking, amorphous influencing. These types of impact are very difficult to quantify, yet cover a large portion of the progress made. Conversely, high-level strategic partners see too many outcomes, in too many regions and countries and in too many sub-sectors. For them, the SSA impact on the ground is ‘lots of small projects’, but in the absence of a centrally driven skills system (which has largely been discredited) then evidence of a plethora of projects and pilots may be evidence of success.

There is also a distinction between SSA development and SSA impact. A high-quality SSA and significant impact are not the same thing. There was clearly a link for most interviewees between the quality of the SSA and the extent to which impacts had been seen to date in specific sectors, but this was not always the case.

5.1.5 Differing expectations of impact and what constitutes success

Too many SSA priorities and solutions rely on a contested understanding of the balance between employer and public investment. Very few SSAs are explicitly couched in terms of the ‘who pays’ debate, even though it underpins the analysis of demand and supply, the identification of priorities and dialogue with partners and employers. This has led to a mismatch of expectations. Partners wanted to see more tangible employer commitments to invest, whereas SSCs and their employers were – to some extent – lobbying for increases in funding.

Arguably, stakeholders in Scotland had the clearest line on this – but it was also the one that ran most counter to what SSCs believed they were trying to do (in the context of a demand-led system) and contributed to fundamental disjuncture. This is over-simplifying the

position on both sides – some of the most effective SSCs understood the paradigm of working within stakeholder confines and in the context of competing priorities. Sometimes SSA development was explicitly couched in these terms. For example, Semta's early SSA development involved extensive employer consultation sessions framed in terms of current expenditure from the public purse on training, the notion that this was fixed and therefore debates would have to be in terms of prioritisation and employer investment.

Too often though, the debates became polarised. Even within the SSDA, we have heard competing viewpoints that SSCs should have tried to be both more and less ambitious in terms of their SSA solutions. Only now, in the context of the Leitch recommendations are SSCs being given a more unambiguous steer in terms of their future focus.

5.2 Impact on Relationships

5.2.1 Partners

The SSA has been relatively successful in positioning SSCs within skills debates across regions and nations. Much of the value has been in setting the parameters for an on-going dialogue. One SSC in Northern Ireland, while frustrated by the degree of movement in delivering the agreement, did note that the terms for discussion had shifted in conversation with partners. With an SSA in place, there was no longer a debate in terms of what the evidence was for any given proposal. SSAs have also become embedded within the strategic and delivery planning across a number of the English regions:

- North West: Detailed references to individual SSCs have been made in the context of extensive skills academy work. Upfront reference to work with SSCs in 2006/07 in the RSP's annual statement of priorities.
- North East: The Skills Action Plan for 2006/07 includes substantial references to the sector dimension, the work of SSCs and integrating the SSA into the work of Skills North East (the RSP). The SfBn is also involved in the RSP's strategy group (via Improve). Some examples of partner progress relate to work being undertaken by SSCs.
- West Midlands: The work plan for the RSP includes SfBn representative as a lead co-ordinating partner. The SfBn (Lantra) also sits on the Board. Forward-looking work also includes projects and development work with SSCs.
- South West: The RDA outlines a number of examples of work with priority sectors (Semta; Improve; Skillset; People 1st). The SfBn is noted as a support agency for delivering a number of strategic priorities in the 2006-09 RSP delivery plan.
- South East: Considerable focus on skills with a couple of projects which refer to the SfBn (HE networks and training pools). There is also some evidence of projects being undertaken with individual SSCs (e-skills UK; Skillset).
- East of England: Implementing SSAs is one of six core work programme for the East of England Skills and Competitiveness Partnership for 2006-09.
- London: London Employment and Skills Taskforce for 2012 includes 3 SSC CEOs, plus SSDA as an observer. The London Skills Commission Strategy (05/06) included delivering SSAs as an activity (and explicitly articulated the priorities from the pathfinders). It also included SSCs as a partner on a range of activities.

In the East of England, the regional skills partnership work programme includes a specific priority to implement SSAs. This was initially actioned with ConstructionSkills as an SSC that was both advanced in the SSA process and well-established in the region. The SSC presented its SSA to regional partner chief executives and four priorities were agreed – all of which were from the SSA – and a lead partner identified for each activity:

- Introducing adult apprenticeships (based on evidence from a previous pilot) – led by the LSC with £500,000 funding
- Procuring the supply of training, securing investment and ensuring the availability of jobs linked to that training – led by Build Norfolk
- Leadership and management – a cross-cutting theme led by EEDA
- Working in schools, promoting young entrepreneurs.

This example shows how an SSA can provide a starting point for partners to agree more substantial actions. It was emphasised that a lot of post-SSA negotiation was required to get partners to lead on specific areas. This was always likely to be the case for some longer-term SSA actions, but it has in practice been more widespread than that.

The model in North West of England shows even more widespread partner influence and engagement. Regional partners look to the SSCs to bring their SSAs to the table regionally through their SSPA. Where there are SSA Action Plans for the region, these are adopted as the action plan for the SSPA. SSPAs are charged with identifying where there are barriers to delivering SSAs in the region. If these cannot be solved by the SSPA they go to a sub-group of the RSP to deal with and finally to the RSP itself.

SSPAs have meant that, in the absence of an SSA, the region still has an action plan for the sector: *'once we get an SSA we need the coordination and if the SSC is well organised and connected in the region that works. Chemicals is a good example. Cogent are developing their regional action plan and when they reached Stage 3 we adapted the SSPA action plan to fit that so the SSPA action plan reflects the SSA'* (regional stakeholder). An SSC noted that this was an excellent way of getting shared ownership of SSA solutions, providing *'a natural progression'* towards shared ownership.

From the SSC perspective, the SSPA approach was seen as extremely helpful. One SSC said that it *'made engagement much easier for us and for stakeholders'*. For example, *'for us, we would have to have lobbied the RDA on our different SSAs on a number of occasions'*. Instead, the RDA took ownership and responsibility for getting all the right North West stakeholders together round the same table and producing an action plan which all partners would buy into, something that has been helpful for a number of SSCs:

- *'That's unique – it's not happening elsewhere.'*
- *'The SSPA concept is tremendous and, in spite of us not being as swift to engage as we should have been, there has been some really good work coming out of them.'*

There are a lot of networking-type impacts from the SSA. The government office in the East of England gave the example of how Skills for Care had identified gaps in basic skills as a significant issue. Through the Sector Surgery Days set up to manage SSAs, links were made with the regional Skills for Life group which meets quarterly to share ideas on tackling basic skills gaps in the region.

The Local Government Association (LGA) provided examples of how its partnership with People 1st, which developed out of the SSA process, had led to a range of impacts. Key to this was the identification of shared priorities. Engagement was of interest to the LGA because it has a priority to support work around the 2012 games. This is also a clear focus in People 1st's work. It is able to provide the SSC with access to its networks within local authorities and industry bodies that People 1st have previously not had access to – so the LGA is a conduit into local authorities. As the representative body of local authorities, it can also provide the oversight and strategic prioritisation of issues that People 1st can more readily engage with. A range of initiatives have emerged as a result of the joint working relationships now established:

- LGA, People 1st and DCMS meet on a regular basis to plan and deliver joint ventures.
- The LGA has provided People 1st with exposure to networks enabling them to forge direct relationships with local authorities and industry bodies they did not previously have strong relationships with.
- People 1st are working with Tourism Together, a group of five trade organisations / industry bodies, that have now agreed to collectively develop CPD materials in conjunction with People 1st rather than continue with their own initiatives. This work will become part of the People 1st skills passport. It is a direct result of collaboration with the LGA that has resulted from the SSA.
- The LGA has signed up in the draft Action Plan for the People 1st National Skills Strategy to actively disseminate and support involvement in the skills strategy.

Given the nature of the shared interest, some of these developments may have taken place anyway – but the strategic grounding given by the SSA process puts the SSC in a stronger position to act and to influence. The SSA has not just cemented relationships, it has provided a platform for new relationships. One stakeholder in Scotland said that *'we have learnt from SSAs. With the non-key sectors for instance, we might never have met them without the SSA process....meeting them really made me think'*. Both Skills for Justice and Asset Skills were reported as being impressive 'non-priority' SSCs in this context. This is a by-product of the SSA, but should not be over-estimated. Impacting on partners is much more difficult for SSCs who do not find themselves priorities in a particular area. One SSC in Northern Ireland described feeling *'invisible'* to key government agencies.

The SSA has also helped to position the SfBn in terms of more substantial policy debates, so that it can respond to and influence policy developments, such as the Leitch review on skills and the VQRP. It is unlikely that the network could have played such a central role in the qualification reform programme (leading Strand 1 of the VQRP) without the evidence base and employer engagement developed through the SSA.

5.2.2 Employers

There are two aspects to the SSA impact on relationships with employers:

- Mobilising employers to influence the shape of skills provision.
- Influencing employer behaviour in relation to skills i.e. increasing employer planning and investment, and employer engagement in skills.

Mobilising employers to influence the shape of skills provision

There are numerous examples of individual commitments from employers to shape skills provision. For example, an employer in Cogent's footprint committed 20% of an HR manager's time to support the development of career pathways (an SSA outcome). This works for some employers, in some sectors, but is more challenging in relation to smaller employers or industries that lack a skills investment culture. Yet even this individual support is difficult to capture in the context of the SSA. It may be relatively fluid and is about employer offering time and expertise.

Skillset in Wales had an SSA priority relating to company support that was difficult to get off the ground. It was able to mobilise influential, key employers (including the Chair of its Industry panel) to support the case for action, which resulted in the opportunity to tailor WAG's workforce development programme to the needs of the sector. It meant that a small number of HRD advisors could be trained as sector specialists (improving the HRD 'offer'). Skillset now also receives LMI from the company profiles completed by HRD advisors. The London Construction Forum was presented as another example of effective mobilisation by stakeholders – which has also involved commitment from the LSC. The forum is chaired an employer and also has three employer-chaired sub-groups working on shaping the skills academy, aligning provision and ensuring provision is fit for purpose.

Broadening the base for employer engagement and influencing employer behaviour

One of the employers interviewed felt that the SSA process mitigated against achieving widespread commitment from across the employer base. The structure of the SSA process reinforces the divide between employers who are 'insiders' and 'outsiders': *'If you're already engaged in the sector, the SSC, other organisations around you, the SSA is just another joint task you do together... [but it] is not an easy process to come to cold. The whole language, the format is not easily accessible'*. The SSA therefore often means that employers who are already involved in skills debates become more involved but those who are disengaged are distanced further. Furthermore, the quid pro quo of the SSC model is that by covering larger, strategic sectors, it would be easier to build a powerful employer voice to influence skills provision. A couple of employers we spoke to compared the SSC approach with the previous NTO and felt that, because of a larger scope, the SSC was less in touch with their particular industry. This partly harks back to an earlier question (that has also dogged the SSA process) about how employers themselves perceive and define their own industries.

In developing and delivering SSAs, SSCs have to work with engaged employers – to show creditability and buy-in. This is a logical response, but does not meet wider ambition – reiterated by Leitch – of widening employer investment in skills. Undertaking an SSA does not transform an industry's culture, but it can still usefully sit alongside more short-term aspirations. It can provide a starting point or hook for engaging previously unengaged employers, although it is still too early to look at impact in those terms. ConstructionSkills highlighted an inevitable disjuncture between the SSA and much of its day-to-day support work with employers on skills development (*'employers want solutions to the issues they have today'*). The SSC has eight company development advisors in the East of England working with employers to develop training plans and secure liP accreditation. The logic is that the advisors are working towards short-term goals, while the SSA is about long-term issues. This makes it more disparate in terms of employer positioning.

Another SSC made the point that employers will only commit to actions they see as directly relevant to them, and that the 'high-level' nature of proposals is a barrier to sign-up. A different SSC emphasised a similar point, saying that its own SSA had not widened the base of employers engaged across the sector: *'our employers are very action and result oriented and don't see the medium and long term benefits that employers in other industries might'*.

Lantra, on the other hand, described how the SSA had provided a model that impacted on its short-term delivery with employers, such as the implementation of a passport scheme with First Milk Scotland (SSC designed the passport) and the introduction of a new continuous training programme for crofters (SSC provided the competence framework). The SSA impact is about having a systematic approach – identifying the problem and brokering an agreement, with the SSC as enabler.

Part of this involves SSCs facilitating the link between employer need and public policy objectives, especially in relation to supporting entry to employment. Improve has brokered an arrangement between a key employer, Premier Foods, and Jobcentre Plus. It builds on an existing Jobcentre Plus scheme to provide three-week work trials with employers, during which the jobseeker still receives benefits. In this scheme, Jobcentre Plus funds training for jobseekers to obtain their food safety and health and safety certificates as well as providing other training in employability skills. The employer offers a guaranteed interview at the end with a view to a permanent job.

There is a more fundamental question here about what the realistic expectations for employer commitment could be in the context of the SSA. One LSC respondent said: *'Where things are government priorities for funding, it's working. But I haven't seen the evidence of them influencing delivery for things we don't fund... [SSAs] are not just about what public funding is used for. What about the provision employers are paying for? How are SSCs evaluating the effectiveness of their outcomes here?'* Yet an agreement cannot be expected to contain commitments relating to the specific use of provision by employers. The impact has to be in terms of building sector-wide endorsement from employers. For example, Skills for Logistics produced a four-page 'purple pamphlet' that *'hundreds of employers signed up to'*, a vision setting out that professional development was the only way to tackle the issues raised by employers. It was an endorsement from employers and alignment behind an idea rather than a commitment to act. Yet the notion of a professional development stairway was a significant step forward for the sector.

5.3 Using LMI to support planning and investment

The SSA has marked a significant step forward in terms of the use of LMI to support planning and to underpin discussions on skills investment. The LSC's regional commissioning plan in the East of England, for example, states that: *'Sector Skills Agreements, alongside the National Employer (Skills) Survey, have given us a sharper understanding of the needs of employers than ever before. We will work closely with colleges and training providers to increase the proportion of enrolments on programmes leading to qualifications valued by employers and identified by SSC's as priorities'*¹².

¹² P9, Learning and Skills Council East of England Regional Commissioning Plan 2007-08 (January 07)

A number of RDAs in England have also made clear statements of their engagement with SSCs and the use of information and intelligence. In the West Midlands, the RSP's six-monthly update describes work to create a skills balance sheet to respond to what is emerging through the SSA. The Skills Action Plan in the North East includes a table showing skills needs for all SSCs. One stakeholder in the North West said that while it was difficult to generalise, felt that '60-70%' of SSAs have changed regional decision-making on provision. Arguably, this is because discussions relating to the SSA evidence were taken at a level clustered around interested parties for that sector.

Much is made of the extent to which SSA LMI is most able to influence where it is aligned with partner priorities. The identification of a skills gap or shortage is not in itself sufficient for action. One RDA interviewee made the point that *'addressing shortages in leadership and management skills is an issue identified by almost all SSAs, but doesn't meet anyone's PSA (target) to deliver that'*.

A stakeholder in Scotland also picked up the cross-cutting skills issue but felt that this was not incorporated into the latter SSA phase effectively: *'Issues such as literacy and numeracy are identified as key in the Stages 1 and 2 analyses but then they disappear as issues – we can't find anyone to hold on to them'*. The SfBn has identified lead SSCs on the major cross-cutting skills issues, but this is a responsibility *on top of* developing an SSA. In certain areas, individual SSCs have been tasked with drawing out the cross-cutting implications of all SSAs (LLUK is undertaking an impact review anticipating how the SSA actions across the board are likely to impact on the lifelong learning workforce and provision).

One of the key factors influencing the extent to which LMI can influence planning is the way in which it is packaged and used by SSCs in relation to specific audiences. The SSA provides a large volume of intelligence that has to then be tailored for maximum impact. The SSA process has made SSCs consider how they best deploy LMI to support a wider work programme. The pathfinder SSA evaluation noted the integration of research into the wider work of the SSC, making it more purposeful as a consequence.

This trend was less strong in later tranches, but it is an unavoidable part of the process. Cogent, for example, undertook a separate analysis around the time of its SSA completion on further developing its own LMI and skills intelligence capacity and capability. It looked at each component of LMI (e.g. futures, modelling, intelligence, labour market information) and assessed the needs of a wide range of users in order to provide options for developing its research function.

The user focus, and the idea of developing LMI as a tailored product is a clear lesson from the SSA. Skills for Justice, for example, is developing new online LMI matrix which will be populated with publicly available data and employer survey data to allow employers in the sector to benchmark themselves within a region or sub-sector. These approaches are significant developments in addressing the limitations of generic SSA Stage 1 and 2 reports.

This type of development is important because the fitness for purpose of SSA LMI has been one of the most contentious issues for partners. Within the project board model, especially in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the priority was more focused on achieving comparability across the SSAs. In Northern Ireland, specifically, there has been a huge focus trying to develop SSC LMI as the main source of sector intelligence. This shows a significant

commitment from government to embed employer intelligence for planning purposes. Additional funding has been offered to SSCs in this context, but some of the expectations in terms of being able to cut Northern Ireland data by, for example, occupation, area, or sub-sector are unachievable.

The main signal that SSCs are in a position to influence through their SSA LMI is the response from partners when the LMI presents a different picture to existing sources of data. Some examples of differing analysis between the partners and the SSCs comes down to the level and quantum of research that has been undertaken (e.g. the survey sample sizes when compared to national sources). An LSC respondent emphasised that its main national source (NESS) is just a means to double-check the robustness of the LMI, it does not mean that they cannot agree an action where differences emerge. An example was given of an SSC reporting a 10% difference in what employers were saying compared to other sources. Critically, though, irrespective of the different analysis, the LSC still agreed with the logic of the proposed action (in this case technical certification).

The real challenge is how well the information is interpreted and the action for change. The danger is that every different view/perspective has an action associated with it (the long wish list) when in reality if the main strategic issue was addressed, all the others would fall away/be resolved. A stakeholder in London referred to an SSA Action Plan for London that *'captured all the issues and want(ed) the partners to respond to each one – when, if we undertook the reform of qualifications, it would fix a whole number of them'*. The charge is that SSAs are sometimes reflecting employers views literally without analysing what are the underlying causes and endemic issues that need to be resolved.

LMI derived from the SSA is also used by some SSCs to gain access to new parts of their industries, extending and deepening SSC influence. It is a tool for engaging both employers and stakeholders. It does not directly influence policy, but it helps to create the argument or the case for change. Cogent provided a couple of examples of how presentations of its research had positioned the SSC to influence provision:

- After presenting various pieces of research, Cogent was able to link up with Warwick University Manufacturing Group, a provider of industry training. It uses Cogent as a route to marketing courses and in return the SSC is able to influence content and ensure that employer needs are met.
- After a presentation to Liverpool University's pro-vice chancellor, Cogent were invited to sit on the board of UK GRAD, a programme to up-skill post graduate researchers with personal and professional skills. This offers them a position to influence the transferable skills offered to graduates in the sector and beyond.

LMI has also had an important impact on a range of other SSC activities. The SSA analysis is the bedrock of the SQS, for example. These impacts are described below.

5.4 Success and Outcomes

Looking across the responses from stakeholders and SSCs, the main direct success from the SSA process to date seems to relate to having a better-connected conduit to feed the sectoral, employer perspective into skills policy and planning. The key outcome is that demand-led considerations are more prominent in all of these debates.

There is more rigour, vision and planning around employer skills issues and strategy formulation than there was in the past. Larger, more sophisticated SSCs might have been able to deliver this without a defined SSA process – but it would probably have taken longer to get there. For the smaller and newer SSCs, it has been important that there was a defined process, which partners understood. Undoubtedly, in undertaking the SSA process more SSCs have improved both their own research capacities and their industry knowledge base. There is more consensus among funders and providers that the ‘employer voice’ should influence provision. Even though that influence is still often at the margins, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland at least, the view that providers know best has been challenged.

Almost all of the impacts outlined earlier are predicated on SSCs working effectively in partnership with others. Where common interests are aligned, this is beginning to influence provision. For example, Improve in Wales reported that since producing the SSA, funding had been secured from HEFCW for a food science conversion course. A new partnership had also been brokered through the WTUC in the bakery industry. This led to the establishment of learning centres with employers and the launch of a new apprenticeship framework, tackling the challenge of upskilling the workforce to Level 2 through Level 1 pre-apprenticeships (accessing Union learning funds).

Some relatively substantial shifts are beginning to emerge. Skills for Health described how its England SSA is a brokered agreement between the NHS and the LSC. This joint investment framework for health, levered £5 million from the LSC as match funding for employees within Bands 1 to 4 (e.g. support staff etc) in the health sector. Similarly, the LSC’s tender commissioning for apprenticeships includes a call for provision of 25+ apprenticeships. The expansion of apprenticeships to adults was described by the LSC as a direct response to the SSA (e.g. Lantra). The consultation version of the 2008 Wales Skills strategy describes a new mechanism for enabling partnerships between employers, providers and other stakeholders. It includes a commitment from WAG to *‘refocus our funding by creating a major Sector Priorities Fund to deliver many of the strategic learning priorities identified by employers, for example through Sector Skills Agreements’*¹³.

These impacts do not only relate to the public funding of provision. The SSA has put in place the rationale and framework for employers to increase investment. This is a long-term process, but the SSC influence is starting to be felt. For example, a stakeholder in the East of England was impressed by an approach from Automotive Skills developing a qualification directly linked to providing a benefit to employers to encourage investment (employees had to demonstrate improved productivity to achieve the qualification).

If the SSA is understood as a process of partner and employer engagement then it is important to state the extent to which it has provided a basis for supporting a much wider set of activities. One SSC described how the *‘shadow of the SSA’* had influenced how it works fundamentally in terms of protocols for engaging partners and employers, being the driver for establishing an employer network to input into skills debates, providing a sense of strategic direction for future activities and the evidence base for setting that direction.

¹³ Skills That Work For Wales: A Skills and Employment Strategy (Consultation Document), January 2008, WAG

Even where the confines of the SSA development process itself have frustrated SSCs, it has cemented a set principles for doing their job. A number of interviewees made the point that SSAs tended to encapsulate 'need' rather than solutions. Even identifying need in this way in major step forward in many sectors and is a necessary precursor for action. One of the most potentially valuable, but difficult to pin down, impacts in this context is building SSC confidence to interact with and speak for a sector. Arguably, an emerging sign of a mature SSC is one that can offer coherent picture of skills needs and priorities that rises above the noise of individual employer lobbying and takes a sector-wide perspective. Approaches such as the Skills for Logistics career framework (the Stairway) may not in themselves deliver skills investment and improved productivity – but they are a necessary starting point for achieving those aims in the longer term. This is also why numerous stakeholders and SSCs made reference to the ambitions of the SSA explicitly in the long-term.

Government agencies responsible for public funding have to focus their resource on those aspects of training that benefit the wider economy, not just the individual or the employer. Linking public support to qualifications is one way of doing this, but is difficult, in the absence of a system with a clear ladder of progression and a unitised structure, for SSAs to make real headway. The slow progress on funding and qualification reform has therefore been a barrier to SSA impact.

In the absence of a reformed qualification system that can link skills and training provision to the occupational skills and standards needed by employers and employees, SSCs have had to focus on other ways of influencing supply. Hence, government's commitment in the 2005 White Paper¹⁴ that the major funding bodies in England (LSC and HEFCE) would 'reflect' agreement priorities has become over emphasised and is practically difficult to implement. Comparatively, action is much harder when it is dependent on general calls to reform provision. It was, though, still felt to be *'useful to have a broad document that sets the platform'* from which actions for change can emerge.

In this context, the SSA has been integral to providing employer input into the wider reform of UK vocational qualifications, by way of the development of Sector Qualifications Strategies (SQS). There is no way that the vast majority off SSCs would be in the position to develop an SQS without first undertaking the SSA process. The SQS provides a consolidated picture of the use of qualifications. It outlines the extent to which qualifications and other learning provision are valued by employers, as well as issues relating to the sector working environment and an outline of how SSCs will work in partnership with others to achieve the future vision for the sector. Much of the evidence for this is SSA-related and, in fact, the SQS typically provides the shorter, more concise encapsulation of the sector skills issues than the SSA.

One SSC interviewee was looking to the SQS not the SSA to deliver what employers need. An LSC respondent concurred, noting how pilot SQSs that stated priority qualifications could be fed directly into the LSC's procurement strategy in a way that SSAs could not. For the LSC specifically, it is almost as if the SSA has been superseded by the SQS, which has a far more practical function. Significantly, the SQS is a clear lever for change with the LSC because it is embedded within a major reform programme.

¹⁴ P13, Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work (Part 1), March 2005

There is still a degree of disengagement between wider initiatives at regional level (e.g. academies) and those at national level (e.g. diplomas), for which the SSA could be an organising tool. One RDA respondent recalled being targeted by a particular SSC for funding to promote a diploma without recognition that the RDA had already agreed to make a significant investment in the National Skills Academy for that sector within the region. The perception is that the SSA should be tying these actions together, so that the SSCs can organise their stakeholder interactions in a more co-ordinated fashion.

From the SSC perspective, work undertaken during the SSA provides the foundation for many of these activities that require employer mobilisation. For example, when Cogent was developing its case for Process Industries National Skills Academy, the SSA LMI helped to provide the case for acting collectively and for creating a vehicle to deliver skills provision (around a clearly identified need). As a result, over 40 employers have invested a total of around £850,000 in the Academy. This shows the potential SSA spin-offs where and when opportunities surface for sectors to take co-ordinated action. SSA outcomes have been limited by the extent to which these opportunities have emerged so far, but they are likely to prove critical to realising the benefits of concerted employer action in future.

6 PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

6.1 The SSA Going Forward

Going forward from here we would suggest that the SSA continues, with a lighter touch process but with stronger commitments to outcomes. There needs to be an on-going agreement about what the different partners will deliver for employers. Thus far in reality, the SSA is an agreement between the SSC and the public sector on behalf of, and endorsed by employers. In the future, the SSAs, in order to ensure delivery, need to present much stronger case for market failure and justification for public sector investment and be clear what employers, especially large ones, are prepared to fund themselves. The SSA is clearly work in progress and should be seen as such. Despite this it has managed to deliver some important benefits in many cases.

If one thinks that the purpose of SSAs were to deliver quick and substantial changes to the skills infrastructure then the SSA was probably not the right way to go about it. However, if one thinks of the SSAs as fundamentally about relationships and changing the way in which the demand and supply-side interacts on investing in skills and commissioning training – then one could argue that SSAs have set in train the potential for fundamental and sustainable change. But those changes are not manifest yet. Retaining a strengthened but pared down version of the SSA would ensure that the dialogue and relationships between the demand and supply side continue to evolve.

6.2 Recommendations for Action

1) SSCs must own the SSA process:

Since its inception the shape and structure of the SSA has changed, as has the policy and institutional structure it seeks to influence. In a constantly changing skills infrastructure, it is imperative that the SSC are the clear promoters and protagonists for the SSAs.

2) Retain the SSA name

The SSA as a label should be retained. In the State of Play report there was some discussion as to whether the SSA brand was ‘damaged goods’ – this did not come across strongly in the interviews. While people have different interpretations of what the SSA is, it is a recognisable ‘brand’ in important parts of the public sector.

3) SSA products

There still needs to be production of Stage 5 documents – the agreements - that the SSC and its partners can continue to develop, refresh and be held accountable for. There needs to be a UK-wide statement on sectoral development, skills demand and supply – complemented by Stage 5 documents developed at whatever is the most appropriate geographic level to deliver action. This need not be uniform for all SSCs. A pragmatic approach should be the dominant one. An England-wide agreement may only be pragmatic as a series of bi-lateral agreements with some national players such as Jobcentre Plus, whereas for Scotland and Wales country-wide and all-partner arrangements may be more

appropriate and binding vehicles for delivery. It is important to retain the concept of an agreement and to worry less about the Stage 5 report as a product.

4) The SSA Action Plans need to be strengthened

At this point, SSAs are broadly agreements between the SSC and partners to address the issues identified through the process. Few are action plans that detail roles, responsibilities, deliverables, milestones and measures of success. However, there is a very real sense that this is still work in progress, particularly in relation to the English regions. This work needs to continue and be supported.

5) Integrate the SSA process into SSC Business Operations

For many of the partners and the SSCs themselves – the SSA was ‘what we/they should have been doing anyway’. Labour market intelligence, gap analysis, employer engagement and collaborative action to meet employer need are recognised as core components of the SSC business process. A number of SSCs are in the process of incorporating the SSA into their business and corporate plans, restructuring the organisation to align with delivery priorities and setting performance measures to report back to their Boards.

6) There needs to be a fundamental merging and rationalisation of the SSA, SQS and SSC contracting into a single process

In the SSC re-licensing process, the principles and quality standards established for the SSA should be incorporated into the labour market intelligence, planning and performance standards for the new contract and licence.

7) Sectoral LMI as a core function

For the most part, partners value the LMI generated by the SSA process. It is agreed that it is a valuable and important source of information on sector needs and requirements. As a consequence, partners are particularly interested in how and when the information will be refreshed and renewed. Generally, the appetite is not there for the same level of scrutiny over the LMI as in the original process.

There is now an assumption among some partners that the SSCs *do* know their sector – which is a valuable outcome in its own right and justifies perhaps the cost and effort that was placed on the LMI work. The continued development of LMI and LMI competences within SSCs and across the network need to be sustained.

There is certainly demand for keeping market intelligence ‘live’ amongst employers and partners. The demand is for the SSCs to collect LMI on an on-going basis and to explore some of the issues that were generated by the initial SSA in more depth. Certainly, just since the start of the SSA process, improvements in supply-side data have been made and this should continue to be supported and encouraged. Expectations were that data would be continuously refreshed, not that the Stage 1 and Stage 2 reports would be reproduced on the same scale. An overview every two years highlighting key sector developments in demand and supply would be sufficient.

Intelligence on skills supply and demand will be fundamental to an effective overhaul of the skills system and, of course, to the ultimate impact assessment of all the structural changes that are taking place as a consequence of Leitch. As a critical supplier for their sector it is important that the standards of research are maintained across the whole of the SSC network.

8) The structure of the SSA needs to reflect the increasingly devolved nature of decision-making and delivery

SSAs will need to continuously adapt and respond to the changing environmental context. The SSA and the resources for its delivery need to be aligned with the increasingly devolved approach to government in the U.K. The devolved nations and the English regions will strengthen as the primary locus for much of the power. The establishment of the skills boards in Scotland and Wales, the London Employment and Skills Board, the regionalisation of the LSC and the strengthening of the regional and local agenda is set out in the Treasury, BERR and DCLG's Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration. For example, new regional strategies with greater sub-regional and local planning and delivery will have implications for the work of SSCs and the resources they will need to influence planning and delivery.

9) SSC resources for the Nations and regions need to be strengthened

Operating at the level of the nation and region currently already stretches resources. A number of partners at the regional level commented that the work of the SSCs in developing, delivering and securing funding for the SSA was diverting energy and resources from employer engagement. Employer engagement was viewed as the critical USP of the SSCs and the one factor that partners looked to SSCs to deliver.

10) Accountability for Delivery

For a number of respondents arrangements for 'Stage 6' – reporting on performance and accountability for delivery – are fundamental to moving forward. Whilst we have suggested that the SSCs need to own the SSA process – the SSC and its partners must share reporting on action. Collaborative agreements by their very nature imply collective responsibility. If this is the case then SSCs reporting performance to partners in the nations and regions is part of their on-going dialogue rather than an exercise in accountability.

There should be some external or third party scrutiny. The SSCs and their partners should be accountable to government, to Ministers and to employers. This is a wider remit than that which may be taken on by UKCES, as it only has performance management authority over the SSCs until 2009/10 and not all the partners. In addition, accountability needs to reflect the increased regionalisation of delivery and the importance of regional partnerships. Thus, different solutions may apply – for example, depending on composition, the Skills Boards in Scotland and Wales may be appropriate vehicles for assessing performance. The same can be said of the London Skills and Employment Board, chaired by the Mayor of London. In the English regions the appointment of a Minister for each of the regions provides a similar locus for scrutiny and performance reporting. By broadening the basis of ownership for delivery and accountability, the SSCs would have more effective levers with compunction on the public sector to engage and deliver.

11) SSCs have to address the challenge of consistency across the UK

One of the biggest concerns from SSCs and employers is the impact of greater devolution on the consistency of 'offer' to employers. Specifically, that UK-wide firms, or even just within England, have to navigate different training systems and offers. A number of examples were given where successful initiatives within one region could not be offered to firms with locations elsewhere in the country. Initiatives that had been proven to be successful in one region could not be rolled out nationally because of a lack of sponsors and funding in all the other regions.

The potential for employer confusion (and frustration) has been recognised by many SSCs. As the UK-wide actor for their sector, there is a particular challenge for the SSCs to do 'the knitting' for employers. Through the SQS, SSCs are looking to address alignment across and navigation through qualification regimes of the UK. The SQS is incredibly important as a major element of reform within the skills systems and perhaps the most effective lever for influence. Similarly, a number of SSCs are developing products and provision that has common branding across the UK in order to assist employers' demand for consistency. This was also presented as one of the important dimensions of Skills Academies.

However, in a context where there cannot be an imposed consistency across the UK, is this sufficient? Is more required? What are the consequences for employer investment in skills and training when there is no consistency of offer across the UK? Hiding the wiring for employers should be a core role for the SSCs. This also implies that SSCs should, through the UK-wide relationships developed as part of the SSA process, make the case for transferring good practice (successful approaches) across regions and nations.

12) Employer Engagement

In taking forward the SSAs, there has been less evidence of hard agreements with employers to engage in collective action. There has been endorsement of the analysis of the issues and broad support for the solutions proposed. There is much less evidence of 'hard attainment targets' as requested by Leitch and similarly reflected in the Leitch Implementation Plan. There are some good examples of large firms making major commitments to projects. What is less evident are large numbers of firms signing up, which would begin to mark the step change set out in the Leitch Implementation Plan for England:

*'We need employers to take responsibility for the skills of their employees, because of the increased productivity and profitability that investing in skills will deliver. And when they do take that responsibility, they need to know that government accepts its responsibility to support them'*¹⁵.

A number of SSCs recognise the need to move their employer base from broad-based endorsement to commitment to invest in skills. A number of partners also expressed concern that SSC engagement with employers was being diverted into the development of projects, initiatives and funding proposals. However, what are the real tools that SSCs have to translate employer SSA endorsement into increased commitments to invest?

¹⁵ Pg 7, World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England, July 2007, DIUS

Implicit in the SSA process thus far is that, if the necessary changes to the skills system are made, then employers will invest. SSCs are dedicating significant resource to shaping and influencing the skills system to better fit the demands of employers. For take-up to increase and the latent demand of employers to be realised, the changes need to be communicated and sold to employers. Creating a new product does not in of itself increase sales.

SSCs need sufficient resources to pilot, test, evaluate and then promote the new and improved qualifications and training offer to employers. SSCs need access to a flexible source of funding to pilot initiatives identified in the agreement that would make a major difference. Multiple communication channels to employers need to be deployed most effectively.

In England, the largest single mechanism for demand-led funding of training provision is Train to Gain. By 2010, 60% of the adult LSC training budget will be under Train to Gain. Planned improvements in Train to Gain include reduced bureaucracy and greater flexibilities in the programme to extend its reach. The main vehicle for engaging employers in Train to Gain is the LSC funded skills brokerage service. Currently, there are plans in place to move the current skills brokerage service into a single integrated business support and skills brokerage service (under the RDAs and Business Link). The integrated brokerage service could be a major conduit to employers and means for SSCs to translate endorsement brokered through the SSA into commitment to train. To be successful, however, there would need to be a much stronger sectoral dimension to the brokerage services offered and to the depth of specialist sector knowledge held by the business advisers. A strong collaborative arrangement between the SSCs and the brokerage services could provide significant benefits to all concerned.

ANNEX 1 LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Interviewee	Organisation
Donna Edwards	Business Link NW
Jane Stevenson	Careers Scotland
Joanna Woolf	Cogent
Brian Murphy	Cogent
John Holton	Cogent
Paul Jenner	ConstructionSkills
Nicolas Jones	ConstructionSkills
Wyn Pritchard	ConstructionSkills
Karen Hunter	ConstructionSkills
Alan McCartney	DARD (NI)
Shirley Rolfe	BERR
Robert Burles	DCMS
Derek Combes	DCMS
Maria Vlahakis	DCMS
Rob Evans	DEFRA
Simon Cook	Del Monte
John Williams	DELLS
Kim Ebrahim	DELLS
Kate Cartwright	DELLS
Victor Dukelow	DELNI (Analytical Services)
Gail Kennedy	DELNI (Analytical services)
Tim Devine	DELNI Sector Team
Stephen Wilson	DELNI Sector Team
Michael Gould	DELNI Skills strategy
Alison Lys	EEDA
Karen Beckwith	EESCP
Julia Nix	EESCP
David Hatton	Engineering Training Council Northern Ireland
Mike Carty	Energy & Utility Skills
Tom Campbell	First Milk Scotland
Margaret Seiffert	Foundation Degree Forward
Paul Lonsborough	Glaxo Smith Kline
Doug Mcleod	Glenelg Fisheries
Claire Nicholson-Clinch	GOEE
Alyson Thomas	HEFCW
Graham Young	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Alan Almond	Home Grown Cereals Authority
Mandy Pointon	Home Office, Training projects manager
Huw Rees	Improve Ltd
Bob Jones	Improve Ltd

Victor Jordan	INVEST NI
Matthew Thomas	Jobcentre Plus
Margaret Edwards	Jobcentre Plus
Sue Wainright	Jobcentre Plus
David Seffen	Lantra
Peter Martin	Lantra
Madge Moore	Lantra
Mark Chambers	Lantra
Willie Ferguson	Lantra
Paz Paramjothy	LDA
Darah Zahran	Learn Direct
Lyndsey Swift	LGA
Mario Abelo	London Skills & Employment Board
Paul Holme	LSC North West
Katrina Dougherty	LSC East of England
John Thorn	LSC London
Rebecca Rhodes	LSC National Office
Alison Corbet-Gibbin	LSC National Office
Wendy Scott	LSC West Midlands
Daivd Pickering	Meadow Foods
Neil Wilton	North West Development Agency
Stephen Kelsey	North West LSC
Jean Llewellyn	Nuclear Skills Academy
Celia Brigg	North West Universities Association
Julie Meykels	NWDA
Martin Christian-Kent	People 1st
David McHattie	People 1st
Caroline Perkins	People 1st
Roisin McKee	People 1st
Brian Wisdom	People 1st
Michael Cross	Polymer Industry
Joe Stewart	PSNI
Joan Gormley	QCA NI
John Bannister	Scottish Crofting Foundation
Linda Murray	Scottish Enterprise
Scott Gray	Scottish Executive
John Kemp	Scottish Funding Council
Lindsay Middleton	Semta
Andrea Rowe	Skills for Care
Kathy Tyler	Skills for Health
Fiona Donovan	Skills for Justice
Lesley Dunlop	Skills for Justice
Tracey Harkin	Skills for Justice
Tommy Cuthbert	Skills for Justice
Sally McManus	Skills for Justice

Greg Cejer	Skills for Logistics
Stephen Grey	Skills for Logistics
Gwen Winters	Skills for Logistics
Mick Jackson	Skills for Logistics
Serena Rowlands	Skills for Logistics
James Billingham	Skills for Logistics
Siobhan Weir	SkillsActive
Muriel Bankhead	SkillsActive
Steve Mitchell	SkillsActive
Stephen Studd	SkillsActive
Rob Williams	SkillsActive
Richard Tobutt	SkillsActive Wales
Gwawr Hughes	Skillset
Cecilia McCallister	Skillset
Triston Wallace	Skillset
Jane Rexworthy	SkillsSmart Retail
Moira McKerracher	SQA
Tracey Duggan	SSDA
Jacqui Hepburn	SSDA
Paul Devoy	SSDA
Rachel Jones	SSDA
Laurance Downey	SSDA
Martin McManus	SSDA
Neil Wilkinson	SSDA
Bernadette Cronin	SSDA
Hannah Crane	SSDA
Sandra Scott	SSDA
Paul Pettigrew	SW LSC
Juliet Williams	SWRDA
Allan Nesbitt	TEASB
Thomas Coyle	TEASB
David Backhouse	Thames Valley Police
Fiona Richmond	Victim Support
Jon Trew	Victim Support
Meurig Thomas	WAG
Sian Cartwright	WTUC
Deri Bevan	WTUC

ANNEX 2 SSA EVALUATION CASE STUDIES TOPIC GUIDE

The topic guide below provides a comprehensive bank of questions to be used as relevant for the various SSA case study interviews. It is structured around the five evaluation components outlined in the evaluation framework. As far as possible, the questions are framed so that they can be asked to each relevant interviewee group (e.g. SSCs, stakeholders etc)

Using LMI to Support Planning and Investment

Evidence primarily derived from document review. Supplementary questions:

How has the SSC addressed any gaps in LMI that emerged during the SSA development process? Prompt for gaps in terms of geographic coverage and sector coverage.

Is there an agreed plan for tackling gaps in LMI (and evidence of this being actioned already)?

Are there any remaining issues in terms of building and maintaining a comprehensive LMI base for the SSC footprint? Please explain. Prompt for the robustness, timelines and reliability of intelligence.

Explore the costs and benefits of developing and maintaining complete LMI coverage

Use of SSA LMI

What happens / what do you anticipate happening to the intelligence gathered as part of the SSA process?

Was there a strategy for the wider use of SSA LMI (to influence, inform etc)? Please explain.

Is the LMI being used as anticipated – in the appropriate way, by the right audiences etc? If the SSA LMI has not been used as anticipated, what have been the barriers to doing so? Prompt for: internal SSC barriers; external barriers; the functionality of the LMI; issues relating to the use of LMI more widely.

What difference has the SSA LMI made in terms of pursuing particular programmes and initiatives (ask as an open question rather than prompting)? What difference do you anticipate it making in the future?

What difference has the SSA LMI made more widely in terms of stakeholder influencing, employer mobilisation, positioning the SSC / raising its profile?

What is the 'shelf life' to the various types of LMI developed through the SSA process? Prompt for: secondary analysis; primary survey data; qualitative employer consultations etc.

To what extent can the SSA LMI be analysed and presented partially at the regions and nations level?

What is the appropriate balance between presenting a more substantive sector (or sub-sector) picture with the need for geographically-tailored LMI?

Which aspects of SSA LMI *have to* be presented at each geographic level?

Are stakeholder expectations realistic in terms of the geographic break down of SSA LMI? What is it realistic to expect SSCs to produce through their SSAs in this context?

How have any barriers to presenting region/nation analysis been addressed (or how are they being addressed)?

Who are the main audiences for SSA LMI in practice? Please explain and describe.

- How has LMI been communicated and disseminated since publication of the SSA?
- In which formats and through which channels?
- What have been (or what do you anticipate to be) the most effective routes for disseminating SSA LMI?
- How does this relate to different audiences?

Impact and influence of SSA LMI

How aware are stakeholders about the volume of SSA LMI available?

Is it providing a useful feed in terms of planning (refer back to the geographic dimension, if relevant)? If so, how? If not, why not? Prompt for issues relating to: timing and timeliness; robustness and validity; types of intelligence developed

What are the ways in which stakeholders could use SSA LMI? How is other LMI incorporated into planning?

How do stakeholders move from an 'on paper' commitment to use SSA LMI for planning to really incorporating it

To what extent has SSA LMI informed planning and decision-making? Prompt in the context of the following:

- Whether protocols exist for using SSA intelligence (e.g. its part of a Regional Skills Partnership action plan)
- Whether LMI more generally is used to make planning and investment decisions (if not SSA LMI, then what LMI?)
- Perceptions of the degree to which the impact of SSA LMI varies by SSC and what underpins any distinctions

Can you provide examples of how SSA LMI has influenced planning and investment decisions?

- What was the process? What weight did the LMI carry? What was the outcome / anticipated outcome?

Developing Relationships with Key Stakeholders to Gain Influence

Positioning

To what extent are partners accountable for 'delivering' or 'supporting the delivery of' SSA priorities?

Do partners feel that they own SSA solutions? How can this ownership be developed? What prevents it from emerging?

What happens in terms of stakeholder relationships once the SSA is published? To what extent does this vary by type of partner? Please explain.

What are the most effective ways of sustaining the momentum of the SSA to ensure delivery?

- Are there examples of where this has worked effectively, and examples of where of where this has worked less well?

Impact and influence

What commitments have partners made as a result of the SSA? What has been the nature of these commitments, who has made them and why did they make them?

Do you think that these commitments would have been made without the SSA process taking place? How did the SSA itself – the process, the relationships etc – make a difference?

Have partners taken the lead in developing and implementing specific SSA collaborative actions?

- Which partners have tended to take ownership in this way – and why?
- Is there always a logical division of responsibility in terms of taking forward SSA actions?
- How do SSCs go about delineating responsibility and ownership across a broad cross-section partners?

To what extent have subsequent partner actions been a result of SSA dialogue? Prompt for: specific examples; how they emerged; and what the impact has been

How easy is it to identify how the SSA itself (both as a process and an output) has influenced partners?

- Where does it sit in the wider policy-making process? What is the nature of its impact on partners?

Where partners have not be able to commit, to what extent is this a function of the following, why has this been?

- To what extent is it related to the strength and persuasiveness of the case made or the clarity of messages emerging (either from a particular SSA or SSAs in general)?

- Is there a perceived unwillingness or inability of some partners to be persuaded by the 'employer voice' as articulated in an SSA?
- To what extent is it related to the robustness of the SSA evidence base and the credibility of the SSC (SSCs in general)?
- Does it matter the degree to which SSA solutions align with existing priorities and actions? What part have extraneous policy pressures played on preventing commitments being substantiated? Are there any lessons here?
- To what extent have there been difficulties in developing working relationships between SSCs and partners?
- To what extent has access to resources been an issue in practice? And are there corresponding mechanisms in place to pick up on SSA solutions (i.e. is the infrastructure appropriate)?

Have partner commitments been equally forthcoming across the nations and regions? Please provide examples in order to compare and contrast SSA impact in practice.

To what extent have SSCs prioritised their partnership working (in the course of SSA delivery) by region and nation? And to what extent has this been opportunistic?

Employer engagement, involvement and commitment

Employer awareness and understanding

Does the SSC have any market research/objective evidence of a change in the level of employer awareness and understanding of the SSC?

What happens in terms of employer relationships once the SSA is published?

What are the most effective ways of sustaining the momentum of the SSA to ensure delivery?

Are there examples of where this has worked effectively, and examples of where of where this has worked less well?

To what extent has the SSC prioritised employer working (in the course of SSA delivery) by region and nation? Has there been a geographic dimension to employer engagement and commitment?

Employer dealings and involvement in delivering the SSA

What commitments have employers made as a result of the SSA? What has been the nature of these commitments, who has made them and why did they make them? Who has not made them and why?

Are there any patterns to the process or common employer characteristics associated with engagement?

Have some employers taken the lead in developing and implementing specific collaborative actions?

Do you think that these commitments would have been made without the SSA process taking place? How did the SSA itself – the process, the relationships etc – make a difference?

To what extent does employer leadership/ownership for SSA delivery require on-going SSC support? What types of support are required and by whom? Prompt for specific examples.

Where employers have not been able to commit, to what extent is this a function of:

- Lack of strength and persuasiveness of the case made or the clarity of messages emerging?
- The credibility of the SSC (SSCs in general) and comprehension of their role?
- Difficulties in developing and, especially sustaining working relationships between SSCs and employers?
- To what extent has access to resources been an issue in practice (for both parties)
- Employers ability to specify the problem but inability to specify the solution and not how to create a solution in conjunction with the public sector

Employer Commitment and Mobilisation

(Questions will be shaped around specific examples of employer commitment and mobilisation following negotiation with the case study SSCs).

What is the nature of the project/programme etc.

What issue is being addressed? Was this identified as priority in the SSA? Was the issue known about in advance of the SSA process?

How did the idea for the project emerge and when? Did employers propose the solution or were options presented to employers from the SSA/stakeholders? Did the solution/collaborative action exist prior to the SSA being published?

How many employers are involved? How were they engaged in the process (means, resource input, elapsed time)?

What is the nature of employer commitment – pledge of support, leadership, time, finance, design, and commitment to use/buy the solution?

Has engagement/commitment become easier over time? Has successful employer involvement and/or project delivery created its own momentum?

What has the commitment meant in terms of likelihood or achieved success e.g. maintaining momentum, commitment of support from stakeholders, delivery, and impact on the skills issue being addressed?

How does the SSA link to key SSC and SfBn activities

Did the SSA heighten awareness of the influencing role of the SSC (internally and externally)?

Did the SSA process provide the SSC with the means to exercise influence more effectively? For example through provision of:

- Information
- Insight
- Connections
- Confidence
- A power base amongst employers
- Ability to use employers and their company names that could be used to make a point to other business/stakeholders

Did the process increase/deepen connections within the community of stakeholders? For example has it increased: knowledge of and contact with a wider group of stakeholders (including by nation and region) and by a larger number of staff?

Are there specific examples where, as a consequence of connections made through the SSA, the SSC has collaborated with other stakeholders to leverage attention or influence over policy or opportunities that arose?

Did the process increase connectedness within the SfBn – has it increased: knowledge of and contact with other SSCs amongst more staff; increased contact with SSDA; sense of belonging to a more powerful/mature network

Are there any examples where, as a consequence of connections made through the SSA, the SSC has collaborated with other SSCs to leverage attention or influence over the SfBn (internal) or external stakeholders?

Did the SSC make a bid for a national skills academy, specialised diploma, Sector Qualifications Strategy or any other initiative?

- Did the SSA have any influence over the decision to bid e.g. preparedness to proceed, timing, access to or release of resources, base of information, employer and stakeholder support, confidence of success.
- Had the opportunity been identified as an SSA priority action? Did this influence the decision to bid? If not a priority action, why did they proceed?
- Did the SSA have any impact on the submission made:
 - content e.g. use of SSA LMI; was additional research required?
 - design e.g. direct feed through from SSA analysis, use of employer views or groups generated by the SSA process to assist in the process

- employer and stakeholder endorsement and support – was the number of ‘usual’ supporters enhanced as a result of the SSA process (employers and stakeholders)?
- matched-funding e.g. did the SSA process mean that it was easier to identify and persuade other donors to financially contribute to the project?
- quality –was a better more robust bid produced as a consequence of the SSA?
- was the probability of a successful bid enhanced?

Where SSCs have submitted a successful bid – use the same structure of questions to pick up on impact of the SSA over implementation including:

- Content
- Design
- Endorsement
- Funding
- Project planning (internal skills and capability to take complex projects forward, on time and to budget)

What has been the SSA impact on SSC capacity and capability

How has the SSA influenced the **capability** of the organisation

Has it broadened the scope and awareness of Board and staff of:

- The SSC remit
- The industry, its competitiveness and its future prospects
- Employers and their needs
- Stakeholders and their roles
- Elements of SSC business e.g. greater awareness of differences in the operating environment of the different UK nations; greater understanding of qualifications their development, content, accreditation process, awarding bodies etc.

Has the SSA process and its implementation necessitated the development of new skill sets amongst staff e.g. public speaking; writing for different audiences; communication and partnership management; analytical skills; innovation and creative thinking; project management and planning

Was the SSC’s ability to respond to external influences e.g. responsiveness to LSC changes in operations, new opportunities such as calls for bids for Academies, consultations etc. enhanced by the process?

How has the SSA influenced the **structure** of the SSC and why?

- At Board level – new members/ new sub-committees/ changes to the Board agenda
- At the executive level – new team structures / extra staff – capacity and skills/ changes to staff objectives

- Introduced new lines of communication e.g. between teams/nations and regions staff/ Board and staff/ CEO and staff

Has the **business planning process** at the SSC been influenced by the SSA? For example:

- The timing of the planning cycle – brought forward/delayed
- The number of stages in the planning cycle – reduced in number because of the background material in the SSA
- The level of inputs (time and thinking required) – reduced because of the identification of needs/priorities in the SSA/ increased to up-date the SSA
- The structure of the business plan – for example, now reflects structure of the SSA
- Incorporation of monitoring and evaluation information – feedback arrangements, targets and milestones, monitoring information, programme of evaluation studies

Is the SSA a ‘living document’? If so how is it kept alive e.g. action plan up-dated as projects and agreements evolve and become more concrete. Are there plans to conduct a three-year up-date – enquire what this process might look like?

Quality of the SSA

What does the SSA brand mean now to: the Board; staff; industry specific partners; and employers?

- Is the SSA label used?
- Is it recognised?
- What does it mean?
- Is it a positive term?
- Should reference to the SSA continue?

On reflection – what elements of the SSA could have been improved?

- LMI
- Engagement with employers and stakeholders
- Proposals for action
- Why and how?

What difference would these improvements have made to the implementation and impact of the SSA itself?

Was the SSA, as a product and as a process, fit for purpose? Has the SSA set a new standard for the levels of analysis, engagement and presentation of the SSC?

ANNEX 3 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Evaluation Components	Detail	Evidence
1. Using LMI to support local / regional / national planning and investment	a) Quality of SSA LMI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of sector analysis (SSA standard measure) - Identifies skills priorities (SSA Standard measure) - Provides rigorous assessment (SSA Standard measure) - Evidence of continuous improvement (tackling gaps etc) 	Document review: Forms part of the document review and preparation for all SSC case studies. Further evidence derived from an analysis of SSDA assessments of Stage 1 reports.
	b) Use of SSA LMI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence of the use of LMI to support wider SSC activities and objectives - Appropriate use in the nations and regions context - Effective dissemination 	Case studies (specific and general): Provides the main thematic focus for one geographic case study (suggested to focus on a devolved nation) and one SSC case study (from SSA tranche 3 and 4). Will also be covered in all case studies through interviews with SSC (research) staff and stakeholders NB: There is an anticipated link here to the use of LMI (developed as part of the SSA) to support other key SSC and SfBn activities covered by component 4a and 4b below.
	c) Impact of and influence from SSA LMI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporation by stakeholders in planning processes - Evidence of planning and investment decisions being made linked to SSA LMI 	Case studies (specific and general): Provides the main thematic focus for one geographic case study (suggested to focus on a devolved nation) and one SSC case study (from SSA tranche 3 and 4). Will also be covered in all case studies through interviews with stakeholders.
2. Developing relationships with key stakeholders to	a) Positioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key partners have participated in an on-going dialogue to formulate and design collaborative solutions and their respective roles within them - Momentum sustained during SSA delivery 	Case studies (specific): Covered in the four SSC cases studies on Tranche 1 and 2 SSCs. Also an important focus in the six geographic case studies.

gain influence	b) Impact / Influence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key partners have made a substantial commitments to the SSA (financial or otherwise) - Partner commitment is balanced by nation and region as deemed appropriate to the sector - Partners have offered to lead in the development and implementation of specific collaborative actions - Partner activities and actions build on SSA dialogue and outputs 	<p>Case studies (specific): Covered in all six geographic case studies.</p> <p>Document review: Analysis of SSA Action Plans as part of the preparation for SSC case studies (ass appropriate).</p>
3. Employer engagement, involvement and commitment	a) Evidence of employer awareness and understanding growing as a result of the SSA	<p>Document review: Primarily derived from quantitative evidence as presented in the SfBn employer survey.</p> <p>NB: There may be an issue here with regard to timing and timeliness of available evidence.</p>
	b) Employer dealings and involvement in delivering the SSA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustained involvement through SSC fora and implementation groups - Employers acting as ambassadors for SSA delivery - Employer engagement in specific SSA actions and priorities 	<p>Case studies (specific): Covered in all four SSC cases studies on Tranche 1 and 2 SSCs.</p> <p>Workshop: Suggested as an area for focus in the proposed workshop with SSA leads (in order to provide greater breadth of evidence).</p>
	c) Employer commitment and mobilisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence of the commitment and mobilisation of individual employers towards skills development - Evidence of collective commitments (as appropriate) - Movements towards collective commitments, pledges etc. 	<p>Case studies (general): Evidence derived from all 12 case studies, verified by employer interviews as part of the SSC case studies (individual examples) and contextualised through SSC staff interviews.</p>
4. The SSA link to key SSC & SfBn activities	a) Links to other SSC activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence on the UK VQRP (through the Sector Qualification Strategies) - Influence on the programme of national skills academies - Influence on the development of specialised diplomas - Influence on the development of other initiatives relating to the regions and nations 	<p>Case studies (general and specific): Provides the main thematic focus for five case studies (three sector case studies and two geographic case studies).</p> <p>The case study sampling strategy proposes an in-depth focus on the development, adoption and funding of new qualifications within two case studies (which will encompass the UKVQRP/SQS).</p> <p>The case study sampling strategy also proposes two case studies with a thematic focus on skills academies and one case study focusing on the development of specialised diplomas.</p> <p>Supplementary evidence also provided by the other seven case studies.</p>

	b) Network influence activities - Influence on the policy climate (e.g. <i>Leitch review of skills, notions of the demand-led agenda</i>)	<p>SSDA interviews: A key discussion point for upfront interviews with SSDA staff as part of the 'state of play' work.</p> <p>Case studies (general): Discussions with strategic stakeholders as part of all case studies.</p>
5. The SSA impact on SSC capacity and capability	a) SSC capacity building / capability - Influence of SSA on SSC business planning - Involvement of a range SSC staff (including senior staff) in SSA delivery - Clear processes for reviewing SSA progress and implementation.	<p>Case studies (specific): Covered in all six sector case studies, primarily through interviews with SSC staff, and contextualised in terms of the differing points each SSC is at in terms of the SSA development/delivery curve (i.e. evidence of capacity / capability improvement in the four Tranche 1 and 2 case studies; evidence of direction of travel towards improved capacity and capability as a by-product of the SSA <u>development</u> process in the two Tranche 3 and 4 case studies).</p> <p>Workshop: Suggested as an important area for discussion in the proposed SSA lead workshop in order to provided a broader perspective on the SSA influence on SSC capacity / capability.</p>
6. Quality of the SSA	a) Quality of the SSA development process - Use of research and intelligence to shape employer priorities - Involvement of employers and partners throughout the development process	<p>Case studies (general and specific): Evidence primarily drawn from the two sector case studies covering Tranche 3 and 4 SSCs (all interviews). Further evidence anticipated from the six geographic case studies.</p> <p>Document review: New evidence supplements the wealth of evidence on SSA development in previous research / evaluation analysed as part of the state of play work.</p>
	b) Quality of the SSA output - Clear articulation of a vision for the sector - Demonstrating tangible and substantial commitments from employers and partners. - Inclusion of clear performance measures - Progress against SSA milestones	<p>Document review: Evidence primarily derived from a review of SSA outputs as part of the six sector case studies (as appropriate/available).</p> <p>NB: Evidence related to the SSA output has to be contextualised by an understanding of SSA outputs as 'direction of travel' rather than an 'end point' – as articulated in the state of play analysis. This evaluation component therefore links closely to case study evidence from 5a (in terms of progress against (SSA milestones) and 2ab and 3bc (in terms of commitments from partners and employers).</p>

ANNEX 4 OVERVIEW OF SSA PRIORITY ACTIONS BY SSC

SSC	Main priorities, themes and/or proposed actions:
Automotive Skills	<p>1. Management and Leadership: Better managers and stronger leaders working more efficiently and effectively;</p> <p>2. Technical Skills: Up-to-date technicians keeping pace with developments and technology;</p> <p>3. Generic Skills: Employees embracing customer focus, talking, listening, and solving problems;</p> <p>4. Basic/Core Skills: Numeracy, literacy, and ICT;</p> <p>5. Employability Skills: Helping to ensure that potential employees have the right attitudes and motivations;</p> <p>6. Sector wide Issues: Helping ensure examples of good recruitment, HR and training best practice are made available to all.</p>
Cogent	<p>1. COGENT CAREER PATHWAYS: This will demonstrate career paths include job profiles for the roles identified, specify qualifications required for each role, and include case studies and film of role models.;</p> <p>2. COGENT APPRENTICES: A Cogent Apprenticeship framework owned and managed by Cogent setting a clear and understood standard for our industries.</p> <p>3. COMPETENCE ASSURANCE - Making it Safe (PROTECHS): A competence assurance framework that enables companies to assess their systems and procedures against an industry standard and to assess and understand their level of competence;</p> <p>4. COGENT INDUSTRY PASSPORTS: The passport will address the transient contractor workforce and induction level industry specific skills;</p> <p>5. UPSKILL: A clearly defined product and methodology that allows existing employees skills to be easily recognised and gaps filled to allow accreditation against the national standards and NVQ's.</p>
Construction Skills	<p>1. Shaping up the Industry's Business Performance: 1.1. Increasing the Number of Companies Investing in Training (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland); 1.2. Developing Management and Leadership Skills (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland); 1.3. Supporting Life Long Learning in Construction (England, Scotland, Wales); 1.4. Developing Skills for Sustainability (England, Wales, Northern Ireland); 1.5. Improving Intelligence on Skills for the Future (Scotland);</p> <p>2. Brushing up the Industry's Existing Skills: 2.1. Intensifying and Widening the Industry's Qualifying the Workforce Initiative (England, Scotland); 2.2. Developing Flexible Training Structures for Specialist Occupations (England, Scotland); New training opportunities for specialists (Wales); Increase access to and provision of training for specialist sectors (Northern Ireland); 2.3. Assisting the Effective Integration of Migrant Workers (England, Scotland); Integrating migrant labour to bridge the skills gaps (Wales); Assess the numbers of and skills requirements of migrant workers (Northern Ireland); 2.4. Achieving employability for life – on-site (Wales); 2.5. Develop a culture of continuous learning and upskilling (Northern Ireland); 2.6. Encourage employers to take an active role in addressing the training needs of the industry (Northern Ireland); 2.7. Increase the productivity levels of industry; (Northern Ireland); 2.8. Qualify the existing workforce to a minimum NVQ level 2 (Northern Ireland); 2.9. Encourage industry registration schemes as a means of ensuring adequate health and safety training for all those employed in the industry (Northern Ireland).</p> <p>3. Stepping up the Quality of Qualified New Entrants: 3.1. Improving Understanding of Career Opportunities in Construction (England, Scotland); 3.2. Increasing Apprentice Completions and Widening Opportunities for On Site Practice (England, Scotland); 3.3. Improving diversity within the industry (England), through Local Employment and Training Projects (Scotland); Promote the construction industry to a diverse range of potential new entrants (Northern Ireland); 3.4. Increasing Applications for Construction Related Courses (England); 3.5. Increasing apprentice completions by 400% (Wales); 3.6. Construction: a positive career choice for all (Wales); 3.7. Using construction employment projects to attract atypical recruits (Wales); 3.8. Cash for undergraduate drive (Wales); 3.9. Improve the image of, and change the culture of the industry (Northern Ireland); 3.10. Provide adequate training for the 2,600 new entrants each year to 2010 (Northern Ireland).</p> <p>4. Infrastructure to support these Priorities: 4.1. Improving Intelligence on Skills for the Future (England); 4.2. Construction Qualifications Strategy (England).</p>
Energy & Utility Skills	<p>Major Skills Priority 1- Government Policy: National and Devolved administrations' policy: Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Project;</p> <p>Major Skills Priority 2 – Regulation;</p> <p>Major Skills Priority 3 - Competence: Waste Management Certificate of Technical Competency; Waste Management Health and Safety; Upstream Gas; Downstream Gas; Water; Water Competent Operators; Network Construction/Multi-utility; Management and Leadership; Electricity Occupational and Functional Map; Electricity Feasibility (North East, Yorkshire and Humberside); National Occupational Standards Review (Scotland); Up-Skilling Adult Staff (Northern Ireland); Major Skills</p> <p>Priority 4 - Skills Provision: Review Adequacy of Capacity/ Supply; Review Adequacy of Supply: Micro-generation (Wales); Skills Provision (North West); Waste Management Basic/ Essential Skills; Higher Education in Workforce Development;</p> <p>Major Skills Priority 5: - Sector Recruitment and Attractiveness: Diversity; Sustainable Schools Strategy; Apprenticeships (North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside); Modern Apprenticeships (Scotland); Careers Project (Northern Ireland);</p> <p>Major Skills Priority 6 - Renewable Energy Strategy (Scotland only).</p>

e-skills UK	<p>1. Improving the attractiveness of IT careers: To attract the necessary quantity, quality and diversity of people into IT careers, this SSA sets out to: 1.1. Transform the attitudes of girls towards IT-related careers; 1.2. Improve careers guidance and establish work in IT as an aspirational career choice for high achievers;</p> <p>2. Preparing the future workforce. To ensure that the IT-related curriculum in schools, colleges and universities prepares students for successful employment, this SSA sets out to: 2.1. Improve the relevance of learning in preparation for IT professional careers; 2.2. Prepare future business managers with the skills to thrive in the e-economy; 2.3. Enable all students at all stages to improve their skills in the use of IT;</p> <p>3. Developing adults and the existing workforce To realise the potential of the workforce to exploit new technologies for improved business performance and productivity, this SSA sets out to: 3.1. Create effective Continuing Professional Development opportunities for IT professionals, with particular focus on smaller companies; 3.2. Address the skills needed for business managers – especially of smaller companies – to realise the benefits of IT; 3.3. Equip people with the increasingly sophisticated skills needed to use IT effectively in their day to day work;</p> <p>4. Addressing infrastructure matters. To place the voice of employers at the centre of skills infrastructure matters, this SSA sets out to: 4.1. Ensure the IT qualifications structure and approach to recognising achievement is fit for purpose and meets employer needs; 4.2. Ensure that all policy and action on IT-related skills is underpinned by authoritative insight and market intelligence.</p>
GoSkills	<p>Priority 1 – Management and leadership (12 actions);</p> <p>Priority 2 – Skills of numeracy and literacy (7 actions);</p> <p>Priority 3 – IT skills and provision (4 actions); Priority 4 – Capacity of Trainers and Assessors (12 actions);</p> <p>Priority 5 – Retention (3 actions);</p> <p>Priority 6 – Sector Image (16 actions);</p> <p>Priority 7 – Funding for Self-Employed (8 actions);</p> <p>Priority 8 – Releasing employees to train can be an issue (9 actions);</p> <p>Priority 9 – Skills for dealing with passengers (13 actions);</p> <p>Priority 10 – Skills not recognised by qualifications (13 actions);</p> <p>Priority 11 – Demographics (2 actions: attracting youth);</p> <p>Priority 12 – Driver CPC (19 actions);</p> <p>Priority 13 – Funding of Pre-employment Cabin Crew Qualifications in England (6 actions).</p>
Improve	<p>1. Careers Development – ensuring that we have a smart food & drink sector. Programmes designed to address skills shortages from a number of disciplines for entry into and progression within the sector;</p> <p>2. Promoting Productivity - ensuring a competitive and sustainable sector. A programme designed to enable companies and employees to adopt the continuous improvement and lean manufacturing skills that are right for them (e.g. smart logistics, waste minimisation, and energy saving);</p> <p>3. 'Pick and Mix' - ensuring flexibility and adaptability. A strategy which helps employers recognise the achievement of employees, through the use of units which lead to customised qualifications that suit the skills needs of the individual and the employer's business;</p> <p>4. Training – ensuring that the sector can look after its own. Aims to support and encourage structured approaches to training and development in the workplace;</p> <p>5. Connecting the Industry – ensuring good employability skills. Existing skills brokerage arrangements across England need enhancement in order to fully understand and meet the needs of the food and drink sector;</p> <p>6. 'Sweet Success' – ensuring that skills are seen as THE key success factor. A programme enhancing the industry's strategic view of skills, as a means of raising productivity and not merely as a minimum legal requirement;</p> <p>7. 'A Future in Food' – ensuring that potential employees are aware of the sector's potential. A programme to promote career opportunities, entry and progression routes, to ensure skills deficiencies are met;</p> <p>8. 'Learning Together' – ensuring that collaboration gets a chance. Actions to promote regional and sub-regional co-operation and collaboration on skills issues amongst sector SMEs, who lack their own suitable in-house training facilities.</p>
Lantra	<p>Improving business performance: 1. Engage employers in skills and business development; 2. Better managers; better businesses; 3. Promote lifelong learning to increase professionalism, productivity and profit;</p> <p>Developing and recognising the skills of the workforce: 4. Recognise and increase the skills of the entire workforce: 5. Realise the full potential of migrants in the workforce: 6. Value fully the contribution of volunteers: 7. Ensure a sustainable, high quality network of learning providers;</p> <p>Raising the quality of entrants to the sector: 8. Facilitate entry into employment; 9. Make the land-based sector a positive career choice for all;</p> <p>Influencing governments and their agencies for the benefit of the sector; 10. Help shape governments' policies for the benefit of the sector; 11. Maximise public investment in skills and business development for the sector; 12. Provide a rigorous evidence base on which to make policy and investment decisions.</p>

People 1st	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Single communications channel: UK Skills Passport – a central resource for skills information; 2. Management & leadership: Sector specific and continuous development; 3. Qualifications and funding: Ensure the right qualifications attract the right funding; 4. Supporting small businesses: Sector specific signposting of the best available support; 5. Customer service: Gold standard customer service campaign – “getting our experience right”; 6. Chefs: Universal industry standards of professional training established; 7. Industry code of practice: Raising the basic standards in commercial kitchens; 8. World class skills delivery: A national skills programme in an aspirational world; 9. Attracting high quality people: Developing high calibre entry routes; 10. Broadening the appeal of the sector: A new head start for diverse labour pools.
Semta :	<p>SSA action areas for the Electronics, Automotive and Aerospace Industries</p> <p>Management and Leadership: 1. Management development; 2. Leadership development: Productivity and Competitiveness: 3. Supply Chain Development; 4. Continuous Process Improvement; 5. Capital Investment; 6. Reduction in New Product and Process Development and Implementation (NPPDI) Time; Technical Workforce Development: 7. Upskilling to NVQ/SVQ Levels 2 and 3; 8. Improving craft supply at level 3 through upskilling; 9. Meeting the demand for craft and technician development (Engineering Technicians); 10. Improving the supply of technicians at Level 4 (Tech. Eng.); 11. Providing intelligence on current demand and supply need; 12. Tackling graduate skill deficiencies; 13. Increasing the proportion of graduates in the workforce; 14. A specialist degree programme to meet specific needs; 15. More young licensed aircraft engineers to replace retirees; Workforce Planning and Recruitment: 16. Developing strategies and programmes to maximise recruitment into the sectors (through development of academic routes, postgraduate entry, diploma and work-based learning);</p> <p>SSA action areas for the Marine Industry:</p> <p>Management and Leadership: 1. Management Development; 2. Workforce Development Planning Skills; 3. People Skills among Managers; 4. Supervisors and Team Leaders need management skills.; Productivity and Competitiveness: 5. Management Development; 6. Workforce Development Planning Skills; 7. New Product and Process Implementation; Technical Workforce Development: 8. Falling number of graduates in naval architecture and in mechanical, electrical and marine engineering; 9. Graduates able to use new technologies for cutting edge design and processes; 10. There are no qualifications in Marine Surveying within UK qualifications frameworks; 11. Improve craft supply at level 3 through recruitment and up-skilling of current workforce; 12. Training for Multi-skilling and Cross-skilling; 13. In Boatbuilding, new craft skilled jobs are being created through the adoption of innovative techniques; 14. Skills shortages and gaps in specific trades impact on business development; 15. Self led Teams creates the need for IT skills among crafts people; 16. Basic Skills (Skills for Life) for new recruits to allow development; 17. Up-skilling from Level 2 to Level 3; Workforce Planning and Recruitment: 18. Candidates well-equipped with knowledge of mathematics; 19. Peaks and troughs in demand for skills in shipbuilding; 20. High rates of growth in luxury yacht building requires planned supply of high quality skills.</p>
Skillfast-UK	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Graduate-level skills in design and technology; 2. International trade and the supply chain; 3. Supply of technical skills at operative and craft / technician level; 4. In-company training capacity; 5. Information, advice and guidance; 6. Qualifications infrastructure; 7. Management and leadership development. Additionally, there is one more priority theme in the agreements for England and Scotland only: 8. Recruitment and retention. <p>A series of actions is proposed for each country is proposed under these themes. There are 15 actions for England, 12 for Scotland and 12 for Northern Ireland.</p>
Skills for Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progress the development of a UK-wide system of nationally recognised competences; 2. Establish modern and consistent qualification and quality assurance frameworks and assessments; 3. Develop common UK workforce data systems and information; 4. Promote innovative skills development solutions. 5. Develop mechanisms to strengthen employer commitment and engagement with the skills agenda; 6. Strengthen partnership working. <p>There are 21 specific actions within these objectives.</p>

Skills for Logistics	<p>In Scotland, the SSA aims to address the following issues: 1. Image; 2. Diversity; 3. Basic Skills; 4. Skills Gaps and Shortages; 5. Quality of Training Supply; 6. Business Case for Continuous Professional Development. 26 specific actions are planned within these issues.</p> <p>In Wales, The Welsh Assembly Government has taken a major lead in this SSA. Actions planned are as follows:</p> <p>Level 1 – Immediate (short – medium term) funding issues e.g. pilot projects; Objectives: Explore Innovative Approaches to Business Skills and Training Support, Support Qualification Delivery, Research Barriers to Learning which Impact on Diversity Levels, Informing the National Planning and Funding System (NPFS), Improve the Basic Skills Levels;</p> <p>Level 2 – Medium-term issues, e.g. raising the demand for training, skills development and learning in the sector. Objectives: Support Bilingual Training Provision, Developing the Image of the Sector, Reduce Management Skills Gaps, Promote to Employers the Business Case for Training;</p> <p>Level 3 – Long-term structural and strategic issues. Objectives: Improve Provider Quality and Capacity Issues, Regional Delivery Model for the Skills for Logistics sector in Wales, Impact of EU Directives on Driver CPC, Increase the number of Good Quality LGV Drivers.</p>
SkillsActive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve the quality and range of services to attract more customers and participants (22 aims); 2. Improve recruitment and retention of paid and volunteer workers (22 aims); 3. Professionalise and Up-skill the existing workforce (19 aims); 4. Match supply to demand (22 aims); 5. Redirect funding for training (12 aims); 6. Increase sector investment in people (23 aims).
Skillset	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schools Base Provision (Actions: 4 in England, 4 in Scotland, 8 in Wales); 2. Further and Higher Education (Solutions: 5 solutions by sectors in England and Wales, 4 in Scotland); 3. Information, Advice & Guidance for Learning & Work (Actions: 4 in England, 4 in Scotland, 6 in Wales); 4. Introducing Apprenticeships (Actions: 3 in England, 3 in Scotland, 6 in Wales); 5. Supporting Small Businesses (Actions: (3 in England, 5 in Scotland, 6 in Wales); 6. Freelancers (Actions: 2 in England, 7 in Scotland, 9 in Wales); 7. Research (Actions: 3 in England, 4 in Scotland, 7 in Wales).

List of previous SSDA Publications

Please note all publications can be downloaded from our website www.ssda.org.uk

Research Report 1

Skills for Business 1000

Research Report 2

Evaluation of the Trailblazer Phase of the Sector Skills Council Network

Research Report 3

Skills for Business Network – Phase I Evaluation

Research Report 4

Skills for Business 2003 – Survey of Employers

Research Report 5

Skills Pay: The Contribution of Skills to Business Success

Research Report 6

The UK Skills and Productivity Agenda: The Evidence Base for the SSDA's Strategic Plan 2005-2008

Research Report 7

The UK Workforce: Realising our Potential

Research Report 8

Sectoral Management Priorities: Management Skills and Capacities

Research Report 9

Raising Sector Skills Levels – How Responsive is Local Training Supply?

Research Report 10

Skills for Business Network: Phase 2 Evaluation Main Report

Research Report 11

Skills for Business 2004: Survey of Employers

Research Report 12

Skills for Business Network: Phase 2 Evaluation Case Studies

Research Report 13

Sectoral Productivity Differences Across the UK

Research Report 14

Sectors Matter: An International Study of Sector Skills and Productivity

Research Report 15

Evaluation of Pathfinder Sector Skills Agreement Process

Research Report 16

Skills Abroad: A Comparative Assessment of International Policy Approaches to Skills Leading to the Development of Policy Recommendations for the UK

Research Report 17

The Comparative Capability of UK Managers

Research Report 18
Skills for Business Network 2005: Survey of Employers

Research Report 19
Skills for Business Network: Phase 3 Evaluation Main Report

Research Report 20
Training and Establishment Survival

Research Report 21
The Distribution and Returns to Qualifications in the Sector Skills Councils

Research Report 21a
The Distribution and Returns to Qualifications in the Four Countries of the UK

Research Report 22
Training, Job Satisfaction and Establishment Performance

Research Report 23
Cross-Country Analysis of Productivity and Skills at Sector Level

Research Report 24
Sector Skills Agreements Implementation Progress Report

Research Report 25
Job Matching in the UK and Europe

Research Report 26
Skills Upgrading Needs: The Challenge for Employers and Training Providers in Scotland and Northern Ireland

Research Report 27
Qualitative Evaluation of the Women and Work Sector Pathways Initiative:
Interim Report

Research Report 28
SSA State of Play Report

Research Report 29
Employer Engagement

Research Report 30
Engaging in Small Employers in Continuing Training an International Review of
Policies and Initiatives

Working Futures 2004 – 2014 : National Report

Working Futures 2004 – 2014 : Sectoral Report

Working Futures 2004 – 2014 : Spatial Report

Working Futures 2004 – 2014 : Qualifications Report

Working Futures 2004 – 2014 : Technical Report

The Sector Skills Almanac for the UK, 2007

The Sector Skills Almanac for Scotland 2008

The Sector Skills Almanac for Wales 2008

The Sector Skills Almanac for Northern Ireland 2008



A report prepared by GHK with Breen and Partners
for the Sector Skills Development Agency

To obtain copies of this document contact
Sector Skills Development Agency
Callflex Business Park
Golden Smithies Lane
Wath-upon-Deane
South Yorkshire
S63 7ER

Tel: 01709 765 444
Email: info@ssda.org.uk
Web: www.skillsforbusiness.org.uk

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